
**Self and Other in Black and White:
Slaves' Letters and the Epistolary
Cultures of American Slavery
c. 1815-1865**

Ben Schiller

Ph.D

March, 2008



Contents

Acknowledgements	iii
Editorial Method	v
Editorial Symbols	vii
List of Abbreviations	viii
 Introduction	
<u>Literacy, Letters and the Epistolary Cultures of Slavery</u>	1
 Part One	
<u>Slaves' Letters in the Archives</u>	21
Introduction	
Imagining an Archive of Slaves' Letters	23
Chapter One	
Time, Space, and Epistolary Culture: The parameters of the archive	27
Chapter Two	
Archives of Paternalism: Collecting Slaves' Letters	39
 Part Two	
<u>Slaves' Testimony and Slaves' Selves in Historiography, History, and Theory</u>	65
Introduction	
Can the slave speak?	67
Chapter Three	
'Race', Racism and the Historiography of Slavery:	
How ex-slave testimony solved the paradox of passivity	71
Chapter Four	
Self, Psychohistory, and Stuttering:	
The search for African American personalities in slavery	111
Chapter Five	
Reading Lucy:	
Self-narration, egodocuments and performance for Oneself and the other	137

Part Three

Text, *Text*, and Context: Virginia Boyd's Letter to Rice C. Ballard, 6 May 1853 153

Case Study

Virginia Boyd to Rice C. Ballard, 6 May 1853 155

Chapter Six

Reading Slaves' Letters: Virginia Boyd's text, *text* and context 157

Chapter Seven

Situating Slaves' Letters: Contextualizing Virginia Boyd 167

Part Four

The Surveillance of Epistolary Cultures and Cultures of Epistolary Surveillance 189

Introduction

Archival narratives and the epistolary cultures of slavery 191

Chapter Eight

"Evolving the spirit we have to fear": The Surveillance of Epistolary Cultures 197

Chapter Nine

"Dear Master": Cultures of Epistolary Surveillance 235

Conclusion

Self and Other in Black and White 271

Appendices 283

Appendix One

Slaves' Letters and The Numbers Game: Enumerating the Archive 285

Appendix Two

Historical Archives, Contemporary Archivists:

The tacit narratives of the Slave South 293

Appendix Three

Validating Colonization: The ACS in Private and Public 303

Bibliography 317

Acknowledgements

After working on this project for nearly five years the list of people to whom I owe a debt of thanks is long. Most importantly thanks to Dr Tom Webster for his unwavering support, his inspiration, help and encouragement; he shepherded this thesis through some dark times and saw me through some deep doubts, and my gratitude can only be an inadequate recompense for his trouble. I am also indebted to Dr Alan Day who had confidence in me and indeed has given me confidence in myself throughout my career at the University of Edinburgh. Many other academics have also helped me along the way and I must especially mention Dr Phil Cullis who inspired when I was an undergraduate and whose example encouraged me to take my studies further, while many members of the American History section at Edinburgh, and of the history department as whole, both academic and administrative, also deserve my thanks.

Thank you too to those colleagues and friends who have willingly given of their time to discuss my work, read drafts and provide commentary. These are many but in particular I would like to thank Moritz Baumstark, Kirsty Chatwood, Natasha Constantinidou, Alex Goodall, Jack Harrington, Tom Lloyd, Frazer McGlinchey, Keith Mears, Anna Pivovarchuk and Gajendra Singh, while for sharing their thoughts and being prepared to consider my own, thanks are also due to Susanna Ashton, Edward E. Baptist, Ira Berlin, Kristen Cook, Frank Cogliano, Alejandra Dubcovsky, Sophie Heywood, Fabian Hilfrich, Vassiliki Karali, Jane Landers, Randall Miller, Kirsten Phimister, Bernard E. Powers, Joe Reidy, Alan Rice, Leslie Rowland, Juile Saville, Calvin Shermerhorn, Phillip Troutman and Heather Andrea Williams. I am also deeply indebted to the many archivists in American institutions who have been so helpful, even if I occasionally resented this because their willingness to provide me with copies of letters meant I had no need to travel to their archives, on which point I must also acknowledge the financial assistance of the Carnegie Trust For the Universities of Scotland and the British Association for American Studies which together funded my research in the US.

Finally, and by no means least, I must thank my family without whose unconditional love, faith and support this could not have happened, and so this is dedicated to my parents Klaus and Judy, to my siblings Nick, Adrian and Ginny, and to my partner Kirsty and our two lovely daughters Kaitlyn and Lily; my heartfelt and deepest gratitude to you all.

Ben Schiller, 29 June 2007

Declaration

I hereby declare that the work within this thesis is entirely my own, and has not be submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

signed

In my transcriptions, therefore, spelling, syntax, capitalization, and punctuation are copied verbatim, although where the latter is absent or infrequent I have taken the liberty of adding punctuation marks in brackets in order to enable the reader to see how I have interpreted sentence structure. Where illegible or obscured words may be easily inferred from their context, these are shown in brackets, with the addition of a question mark where such readings are based on conjecture, whilst those that may not be inferred either contextually or conjecturally are instead shown by an ellipsis within the brackets. Where legible, crossed out text is included as cancelled type, where illegible by the word 'deletion' in cancelled text within brackets. Where an insertion mark indicates that text that appears above, below or as marginalia should be included at a certain point, this text will be inserted in pointed brackets. In the interests of consistency, where addressees' names do not appear in the original manuscript, or somewhere other than the addressee line, these are appended in italicized text in brackets, while missing/misplaced dates will also be indicated in the typical top right position in similar manner – in both cases where these details appear elsewhere in the text they will be duplicated. Paragraphs will always be indicated by a new line and an indent, whilst pages beyond the first will be indicated by a new line and page numbers given in parenthesis in bold type. Finally, where an excerpt is utilised without prior inclusion of the entire text of a letter, or a section of a letter is left out, this will be indicated by a four point ellipsis on a separate line.

In the interests of brevity my footnotes also make extensive use of abbreviations, not only in reference to the most oft-cited anthologies and journals but also for the names of correspondents that occur with any regularity. A list of these follows, and I have taken care to ensure that their use does not overly detract from the readability of the citations.

Editorial Symbols

[text]

Indicates illegible text or text that is obscured by damage to the manuscript where missing words or letters have been inferred from their context. A question mark – [text?] – indicates conjecture.

[...]

Indicates illegible text or text that is obscured by damage to the manuscript where missing words or letters are indecipherable.

[~~text~~]

Indicates crossings out where the text is legible. Where illegible this is indicated by: [~~deletion~~].

<text>

Indicates inserted text from above or below the line or from marginalia.

te~xt

Indicates where words have been broken across lines.

[name] / [date]

Indicates where the addressee's name, or the date of writing has been inserted in order to make for a common format between letters. Where dates and names appear elsewhere in the manuscript, they are unchanged but nonetheless also appended at the top of the letter.

[page #]

Indicates page number in the original manuscript. New pages will always be begun on a new line, without an indent.

....

On a separate line indicates where a substantial amount of text has been omitted.

List of Abbreviations

Archives:

DocSouth	Documenting the American South, Academic Affairs Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
DUKE	Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.
GLC-NY	The Gilder Lehrman Collection at the New York Historical Society
SCL.USC	South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina.
SHC.UNC-CH	Manuscripts Department, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
UVa	Special Collections Library, University of Virginia Library
TU	Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana
W&M	Special Collections, Earl Gregg Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia.

Anthologies:

AS	George W. Rawick (ed.), <i>The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography</i> , (19 Vols., Westport, 1972).
BIB	Robert S. Starobin (ed.), <i>Blacks in Bondage: Letters of African Slaves</i> , (New York, 1988; 1974).
BME	Ira Berlin, Joseph Reidy, Leslie S. Rowland (eds.), <i>The Black Military Experience</i> , (New York, 1992).
DMLSF	Randall M. Miller (ed.), <i>"Dear Master": Letters of a Slave Family</i> , (Athens, 1990; 1978).
MON	Carter G. Woodson (ed.), <i>The Mind of The Negro as Reflected in Letters Written During The Crisis 1800-1860</i> , (Lancaster, 1926).
ST	John Blassingame (ed.), <i>Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews and Autobiographies</i> , (Baton Rouge, 1977).

Journals:

<i>AAR</i>	<i>African American Review</i>
<i>AHR</i>	<i>American Historical Review</i>
<i>AL</i>	<i>American Literature</i>
<i>ALH</i>	<i>American Literary History</i>
<i>AQ</i>	<i>American Quarterly</i>
<i>BALF</i>	<i>Black American Literature Forum</i>
<i>G&S</i>	<i>Gender and Society</i>
<i>JAHA</i>	<i>The Journal of American History</i>
<i>JBS</i>	<i>Journal of Black Studies</i>
<i>JER</i>	<i>Journal of the Early Republic</i>
<i>JNH</i>	<i>Journal of Negro History</i>
<i>JSH</i>	<i>Journal of Southern History</i>
<i>JSocH</i>	<i>Journal of Social History</i>
<i>MAS</i>	<i>Modern Asian Studies</i>
<i>RHR</i>	<i>Radical History Review</i>
<i>S&A</i>	<i>Slavery and Abolition</i>
<i>WMQ</i>	<i>William and Mary Quarterly</i>

Names:

AH	Anderson Henderson
ArH	Archibald Henderson
AS	Alfred Steel
BD	Bella DeRosset
BM	Burell Mann
CCJ	Charles Colcock Jones
DD	Daniel DeRosset
DN	Dangerfield Newby
ED	Elizabeth DeRosset
EK	Elizabeth Keckley
GS	George Skipwith
HN	Harriet Newby
JCJ	James Cathcart Johnston
JHC	John Hartwell Cocke
JH	James Hope
JS	James Sawyer
LS	Lucy Skipwith
LSC	Lelia Skipwith Carter
MH	Mary Henderson
MS	Mary Steel
NBT	Nathaniel Beverley Tucker
PA	Phill Anthony
PW	Phillis Wheatley
RCB	Rice C. Ballard

RE	Robert Edmondson
RJ	Rynar Jones
StGT	St. George Tucker
THJ	Thomas H. Jones
TMF	Terry McHenry Farlan
TS	Titus Shropshire
VB	Virginia Boyd
WHT	William Henry Thurber
WHM	William H. McClain
WS	William Still
WSP	William S. Pettigrew
WWB	William Wells Brown

Introduction

Literacy, Letters and the Epistolary Cultures of Slavery

Literacy, Letters and the Epistolary Cultures of Slavery

There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.

Walter Benjamin (1940)¹

When I began my research for this thesis the focus was not upon slaves' letters. Nor was I interested in, or even more than marginally aware of, any form of epistolary culture that involved bondspeople. Instead, I planned to analyse how slaves' literacy functioned as a form of resistance and to examine the ways in which it allowed them to manufacture and maintain their own cultural and intellectual space within the seemingly irresistible power of the masters' culture. My interest stemmed from the understanding that given an Enlightenment discourse in which literacy operated as a shibboleth that maintained the distinction between 'races', between subjects and objects, and between 'modern citizen' and 'primitive savage', becoming literate offered a profound challenge to the script that designated the African American slave her master's inferior. Thus, I intended to argue, at both this symbolic level, but also at the very practical level of being able to do such things as forge passes or read newspapers, slaves' literacy *was* resistance.

With this in mind, I initially turned my attention to John Blassingame's collection *Slave Testimony*, repeatedly thumbing my way past the first hundred or so pages which consisted solely of correspondence written by slaves and looking instead for discussions of literacy and educational opportunity (or the lack of it) in the various interviews, speeches and autobiographical texts that make up the bulk of the book. Similarly, I read and re-read Slave Narratives, and pored over edition after edition of George Rawick's *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, searching for references to literate resistance, education and, perhaps most importantly, some indication that slaves themselves were aware of the symbolic, as

¹ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, Hannah Arendt (ed./int.), Harry Zohn (trans.), (London, 1973; 1968), 248.

well as practical significance of literacy.² Nor was I disappointed in this, and as the expert reader will surely be aware there is considerable primary evidence that slaves invested literacy and educational opportunity with symbolic importance and found many ways to 'steal' them, often at the risk of severe punishment, while there is also an important historiographical tradition that focuses upon these issues, from Carter G. Woodson's still highly relevant *Education of The Negro*, published almost ninety years ago, to their most recent re-examination in Heather Andrea Williams' excellent 2005 monograph, *Self-Taught*.³

Yet as I read secondary literature on the subject of African American literacy and education (and though *Self-Taught* was yet to be published at this point, Janet Cornelius' "*When I Can Read My Title Clear*," proved an invaluable text whilst the writing of critics such as Henry Louis Gates Jr., John Sekora and Robert Stepto provided all-important theoretical rigor) I again and again found myself returning to the same question: why was literacy so powerful an issue?⁴ Was it for the symbolic

² Although this vast array of interviews are commonly referred to as "slave narratives" I have been careful to avoid this description since it is important to distinguish between these oral recollections and the autobiographical texts written for and by ex-slaves. To further highlight this distinction I have also capitalized the phrase 'Slave Narrative' which always refers to these literary texts, whilst the materials gathered under the aegis of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and by researchers working for Fisk University, along with their antecedents – the postbellum interviews with ex-slaves conducted by journalists and those arranged by the American Freedman's Inquiry Commission in 1863 – are always referred to as 'interviews'. Cf. *ST*, xvii-lxii.

³ Carter G. Woodson, *The Education of The Negro Prior to 1861: The History of the Education of the Colored People of the United States from the Beginning of Slavery to the Civil War*, (North Stratford, 2002; 1919); Heather Andrea Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom*, (Chapel Hill, 2005).

⁴ Janet Duitsman Cornelius, "*When I Can Read My Title Clear*": *Literacy, Slavery, and Religion in the Antebellum South* (Columbia, 1991); "'We Slipped and Learned to Read': Slave Accounts of the Literacy Process, 1830-1865", *Phylon*, XLIV.3, (1983), 171-186; Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism*, (Oxford, 1989); *Figures in Black: Words, Signs and the "Racial" Self*, (New York, 1987); (ed.), *"Race", Writing and Difference*, (Chicago, 1986); with Charles T. Davis (eds.), *The Slave's Narrative*, (Oxford, 1985); John Sekora, 'Black Message/White Envelope: Genre, Authenticity, and Authority in the Antebellum Slave Narrative', *Callaloo*, 32, (1987), 482-515; with Darwin T. Turner (eds.), *The Art of The Slave Narrative: Original Essays In Criticism And Theory*, (Macomb, 1982); Robert Burns Stepto, *From Behind the Veil: A Study of African American Narrative*, (Chicago, 1991; 1979).

reason Frederick Douglass learned from Hugh Auld, that it would “forever unfit him to be a slave,” or for its practical worth, described by a former Virginia slave William Johnson who recalled the way in which Joe Sutherland, a slave coachman, taught himself to read and write and then used his knowledge to forge passes which he sold to his fellow slaves?⁵ In either case, if these were the risks, then why were any masters prepared to sanction education and indeed letter writing?

At the same time I began to notice various references to correspondence (as opposed to literacy) in the Slave Narratives, where as texts and as material objects letters seemed to serve both symbolic and practical purposes, a case in point being *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* where Harriet Jacobs includes descriptions of letters that were emblematic of her ability to outmanoeuvre her master even as they provided her with the means to do so.⁶ Letters, it seemed, were a far more profitable way to analyse literacy as a form of resistance than the ideological paradigm I had had in mind. And yet what of the letters in *Slave Testimony*? When I had read them seeking evidence of literacy as resistance I had often been disappointed, but returning to them now I began to realize that here was a series of sources that revealed literacy and letter writing as a nexus of power and knowledge about which masters’ and slaves’ interests “articulated.”⁷ This not only opened the possibility of

⁵ Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of The Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself*, (Boston, 1845), (DocSouth, 1999), 33. William I. Johnson, Jr., interviewed May 28, 1937, Richmond, Virginia, in Charles L. Perdue, Jr., Thomas E. Barden, Robert K. Phillips (eds.), *Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia Ex-Slaves*, (Charlottesville, 1976), 165-170, in Ira Berlin, Marc Favreau, and Steven F. Miller (eds.), *Remembering Slavery: African Americans Talk About Their Personal Experiences Of Slavery And Freedom*, (New York, 1998), 52.

⁶ Harriet A. Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. Written by Herself*, Lydia Maria Francis Child (ed.), (Boston, 1861), (DocSouth, 2003), 195-196.

⁷ Christopher Morris uses the Marxian concept of “articulation” to complicate the idea of reciprocity that is central to Eugene Genovese’s analysis of the ways in which slaves accommodated themselves to paternalist self-constructions. It describes the dialectical relationship between domination and resistance by which, as Morris has put it, “masters and slaves in certain circumstances could use each other for their own distinct purposes” which suggests that we should understand their relationship as “reciprocal, if unbalanced” but also as a “structure that confined and channelled and the behavior” of both. Christopher Morris, ‘The Articulation of Two Worlds: The Master-Slave Relationship

examining the practical uses to which bondspeople put their literacy, but also to which slaveowners put literate bondspeople, and thus of exploring the social significance of a number of co-existing and overlapping epistolary cultures of slavery, subjects upon which the historiography appeared all but mute. Both illicit and permitted, these cultures saw slaves utilizing their literacy (or literate others) in order to communicate with each other, with their owners, and with free people and institutions including ex-slaves, organisations such as the American Colonization Society (ACS) and even the abolitionist press.⁸ At the same time the letters also revealed a countervailing set of practices by which masters availed themselves of slave correspondents in order to augment their power in manifold ways.

Such realizations, of course, raised many new questions. Why, for instance, given the fact that the prevailing historiographical orthodoxy treats black testimony as the *sine qua non* of slave history, are the letters notable primarily by their absence from all but a few texts?⁹ Moreover, if as Williams argues “literacy constituted one

Reconsidered’, *JAH*, LXXXV.3, (1998), 985. Cf. Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World The Slaves Made*, (New York, 1976; 1974), 3-7.

⁸ From its founding in 1817 until 1827 the society operated under the rather more unwieldy name of ‘American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States’, but after this date changed to the more manageable ‘American Colonization Society’. For convenience and consistency I use the abbreviation ACS throughout my text, even when this is anachronistic.

⁹ Aside from *BIB*, *ST* and *DMLSF*, each of which obviously contain extended commentaries on the importance of the letters, the only sustained analysis is Phillip Troutman’s recently published essay, ‘Correspondences in Black and White: Sentiment and the Slave Market Revolution’, in Edward E. Baptist, Stephanie M. H. Camp, *New Studies in the History of American Slavery*, (Athens, 2006), 211-242. For other references see Erskine Clarke, *Dwelling Place: A Plantation Epic*, (New Haven, 2005), 2, 176, 305, 309, 315, 392, 394, 430; David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World*, (New York, 2006), 183; Jonathan D. Martin, *Divided Mastery: Slave Hiring in the American South*, (Cambridge, 2004), 54; Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves*, (Cambridge, 2003), 188-189; Norma Taylor Mitchell, ‘Making the Most of Life’s Opportunities: A Slave Woman and Her Family in Abingdon’, in Janet L. Coryell, Martha H. Swain, Sandra Gioia Treadway, Elizabeth Hayes Turner (eds.), *Beyond Image and Convention: Explorations in Southern Women’s History*, (Columbia, 1998), 74-98 *passim*; Phillip Hamilton, ‘Revolutionary Principles and Family Loyalties: Slavery’s Transformation in the St. George Tucker Household of Early National Virginia’, *WMQ*, 3.LV.4, (1998), 546; Deborah Gray White, *Ar’n’t I a woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, (New York, 1985, 1987), 148; Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family In Slavery And Freedom, 1750-1925*, (Oxford, 1976), 287-289, 354-355; Genovese,

of the terrains on which slaves and slave owners waged a perpetual battle for control,”¹⁰ then why do letters from slaves to masters, or which masters facilitated or at least permitted, constitute almost the entirety of the archive of slave authored correspondence? Perhaps most importantly, if literacy was indeed such an important socio-cultural signifier, then why does the archival record appear to show the Antebellum era – a time when biological racism was becoming ever more fashionable as an explanatory justification for slavery, and in which slave educators increasingly faced *de jure* or at least *de facto* obstacles, not least amongst which was societal disapproval – as a period in which an increasing number of slaveowners chose to educate their slaves, either as individuals or occasionally even en masse? These are questions that have been largely unaddressed in previous analyses of slave literacy and slaves’ letters. Answering them will add significant detail and nuance to our understandings of American slavery as a complex, modern and/or modernizing system that even on the eve of the Civil War was far from static or stagnant.

At the same time the letters themselves, and the archives that masters and slaves made of them (which represent choices that invest the material object and its textual subject with potentially new meanings), hold the possibility of examining both their views of themselves and of each other, with the result that a thesis that was originally conceived of as a discussion of slave literacy has become an examination of slave letters and the cultures in which they were produced. As such it argues that while as individual documents each letter may be specific, particular and potentially unrepresentative of slaves’ perspectives in the generality, it is nonetheless representative of the set of social relations in which its author was operating and may in this sense be utilised to give an insight into how slaves sought to present

Jordan, 375-379; Clement Eaton, *The Mind of the Old South*, (Baton Rouge, 1967), 175, 186-187; Kenneth Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery In The Ante-Bellum South*, (London, 1964; 1956), p. 125.

¹⁰ Williams, *Self-Taught*, 13.

themselves (or felt they were required to present themselves) and their correspondents within the contingent confines of such relationships. These close readings therefore consider issues relating to literacy and literate self-expression only insofar as they reveal the extent to which slaves mastered epistolary tropes and literary forms and utilised them as a critical idiom. At the same time, the thesis also looks beyond the individual documents to their cultural significance as keepsakes, mementos and archives, and considers how particular types of letters, be they sentimental devices that maintained contacts between those parted by the internal slave trade, or the products of slaveowners' co-option of slaves as overseer-correspondents, speak to larger socio-cultural issues, an approach that is predicated upon close readings of slaves' and masters' archives as the material embodiments of sentimental and/or authoritarian relationships.

In terms of the insights afforded by close readings of letters then, a good example of the ways in which some slave correspondents utilised epistolary form and literary skill as critical idioms is the way in which such bondpeople appropriated the concept of racialized otherness by inverting the racial practices of their captors and constructing black selves in contrast to white others. Like the master discourse, such a structuring depended on binary oppositions of honour and dishonour, intelligence and ignorance, honesty and lies, but the subject/object relationship was reversed. Such critiques had to be subtle, of course, for unlike their captors, most slaves had to express their worldview from marginal positions and in equivocal ways, and in reading the letters written to masters or over which they exerted their power, one almost always has the sense that they represent stereotypical examples of James C. Scott's "public transcripts of domination." But such shows of dutiful subordination should not blind us to the slaves' own discursive strategies and their ability to play with and manipulate language, strategies that together render such performances far more subtle and nuanced than Scott perhaps allows, for these aspects of resistance

are not so much concealed in “hidden transcripts” as intentionally marginalized and equivocated, given plausible deniability by subtle slippages of meaning.¹¹

Take, for example, the following letter from a slave named Hannah to her master, Thomas Jefferson written in response to the news that he would not be visiting Poplar Forest for his regular Autumnal sojourn due to illness:

November 15th. 1818.¹²

Master, [Thomas Jefferson]

I write you a few lines to let you know that your home and furniture are all safe as I expect you will be glad to know – I heard that you did not expect to come up this fall – I was sorry to hear that you are so unwell you could not come – it grieve me many time – but I hope as you have been so blessed in this that you considered it was God that done it and no other one – we all ought to serve and obey his commandments that you may set to win the prize and after glory run

Master I do not [know that] my ignorant letter will be much encouragement to you as knows I am a poor ignorant creature – this leaves us all well

adieu

I am your humble servant

Hannah

One possible approach to this letter would be to use it to reveal the deep religiosity of slaves and perhaps even their love for the master.¹³ At another level one might interpret it as a knee-jerk denial of guilt from a slave who fears that an owner's illness will lead to an accusation of poisoning.¹⁴ At the very least it might be read as

¹¹ James C. Scott, *Domination And The Arts Of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, (New Haven, 1990), 2-5.

¹² Hannah to Thomas Jefferson, November 15 1818, *ST*, 14.

¹³ See for instance Andrew Burstein, *Jefferson's Secrets: Death and Desire at Monticello*, (New York, 2005), 31, 134. In both these references to Hannah's letter Burstein merely gives the first line of the letter and utilizes it to demonstrate the extent and sincerity of her (and by implication the Poplar Forest and Monticello slave communities') sentimental attachment to their master.

¹⁴ Masters' fears of poisoning were not without foundation. Philip D. Morgan has shown that in eighteenth-century Virginia at least 175 slaves were tried on charges of poisoning (usually of their masters or overseers, although very occasionally of fellow slaves). He suggests, however, that the records may in fact understate the extent of this form of resistance due to the fear of encouraging imitators. Given such fears, and given that slaveowners jealously guarded their power to discipline their slaves in whatever way they saw fit without recourse to other authorities, it is likely that extra-

a slave displaying concern over her master's ill-health because she feared that his death might lead to the destruction of her community, a fear which in Jefferson's case would turn out to be well founded. It may be all of these, but given the recent scientific confirmation of Jefferson's intimate relationship with Hemings, it might also be legitimate to read this piece of slave testimony as more than this. By 1818, when Hannah put pen to paper, Sally Hemings had already given birth to at least four of Jefferson's children and such an affair cannot have escaped the attention of his housekeeper and thus the line "we all ought to serve and obey his commandments," when addressed to a man she may have seen as a fornicator and adulterer, is perhaps no mere platitude.¹⁵

And what of the preceding line, "I hope as you have been so blessed in this that you considered it was God that done it and no other one"? Though one might read this as Hannah denying that she, or any other slave, had poisoned him, given what she may have seen as Jefferson's sinfulness it might also be interpreted as revealing her genuine concern that he might not have been "so blessed" as to be able to see past his preconceptions about his slaves or recognize his own sins and thus that she must help him to correctly interpret the signs of God's judgement. In this construction of the situation, therefore, it is Hannah who is "blessed" with the ability to understand and interpret God's will, while he is cast as the uncomprehending sinner who must be guided down the road of repentance; Jefferson may be as foolish as other slaveholders who read the texts of their illnesses as poisonings, but read correctly, by a God-fearing slave no less, they can be better understood as testifying to a master's sins and to God's almighty power.

judicial punishment was at least as common. Philip D. Morgan, *Slave counterpoint: Black culture in the eighteenth-century Chesapeake and Lowcountry*, (Chapel Hill, 1998), 612-614.

¹⁵ See Jan Ellen Lewis and Peter S. Onuf (eds.), *Sally Hemings & Thomas Jefferson: History, Memory and Civic Culture*, (Charlottesville, 1999), for a discussion of the impact that DNA evidence confirming the relationship between Hemings and Jefferson has had on the history of one of America's favourite founding fathers.

It is in her closing sentence and sentiments, however, that Hannah reveals her cunning: "Master I do not [know that] my ignorant letter will be much encouragement to you as knows I am a poor ignorant creature / adieu / I am your humble servant." First one should note her repetition of "ignorant" for with this appropriation of the discourse that inscribes innate intellectual inferiority into her blackness, she forbids Jefferson to read her letter as a critique because she is too "ignorant" to possibly be critical of him; if it does not "encourage" him it is Hannah's native stupidity that is to blame rather than her judgement. Next, however, comes the juxtaposition of "adieu," surely a far from "ignorant" way to sign her correspondence, while the formal closure, "I am your humble servant" seems almost ironic given that her letter has been anything but "humble."

In effect, therefore, through the tactic of denying her own agency by laying claim to the ignorance Jefferson saw in her, Hannah found a route to defy his power, critique his behaviour, and express her resistance while also maintaining an appropriate level of deference and presenting an overall message that is sufficiently ambiguous as to give her the benefit of reasonable doubt. At the same time, however, she seems almost unable to resist undermining this claim to ignorance (or indeed to humility) by encapsulating her letter within a carefully crafted epistolary form that seems to give the lie to her apparently naïve and innocent references to his sins. Thus by simultaneously validating and yet denying what she perceives to be his image of her whilst all the while utilizing it as a cloak for a critique of his behaviour and a lesson in morality, Hannah in fact reverses the roles, constructing her self as a knowledgeable, just, and God-fearing judge even as she constructs Jefferson as an ignorant and sinful other.

Such literary tactics thus reveal epistolary culture itself as "one of the terrains on which slaves and slave owners waged a perpetual battle for control" of literacy and in this regard it is worth bearing in mind two theoretical concepts that situate my own reading practice. The first concerns the extent to which captive writers were able to overcome a particular problem that faces all subordinate groups when they

choose to appropriate (or equally when they are required to take up) the linguistic tools of their oppressors, namely, as Cutter puts it, “how to use language as a way of achieving liberation, when language itself is a large part of her oppression. How can [she] use her literacy in a way which liberates her from the dominant discursive practices of her society?”:

To speak in the ‘master’s’ language is to remain trapped within a system of discourse which denies her subjectivity. Audre Lorde has said ‘the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.’ One cannot overcome oppression by using the master’s tools, and if language is an instrument of oppression, simply taking hold of it will not lead to a dismantling of the master’s house.¹⁶

But Cutter is careful to distinguish language and literacy on the one hand from discourse as a cultural operation of language. It is not in fact language *per se* that denies the subjectivity of the ‘powerless’, but discursive practice that makes language into a tool for oppression; challenging the discourse is thus to remake the linguistic tool into one of liberation, and such a challenge requires what Freire and Macedo call “critical literacy,” which is to be “able to use language for social and political reconstruction.” As Cutter puts it, “the real struggle is not learning to read and write the word, but learning to read and write the world.”¹⁷

Critical literacy is thus predicated on a self-conscious awareness that one is writing from within a conceptual space from which one can meaningfully reconstruct the world. This is what the late Michel de Certeau termed the “writing laboratory,” a place from within which the literate subject may strategically transform or retain “what it receives from... outside and create internally the instruments for an

¹⁶ Audre Lorde, ‘The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master’s House,’ in Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua, (eds), *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, (New York, 1983), 99, in Martha J. Cutter, ‘Dismantling “The Master’s House”: Critical Literacy in Harriet Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*’, *Callaloo*, XIX.1, (1996), 209.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 210; Paulo Freire, Donald Macedo, *Literacy: Reading the Word and The World*, (New York, 1987), 159, in *ibid.*, 209-210.

appropriation of the external space.”¹⁸ As such, it creates an opportunity for the literate subject (and I would expand this to include those that had access to literate others and who were themselves culturally and socially literate enough to manipulate the relationship between speaker and writer in this relationship) to consciously oppose their objectification through practices of naming, appropriation, and conscious linguistic manipulation. For the critically literate slave, the writing laboratory thus afforded them the occasion to experiment with the artefacts of the master culture, both abstract (literacy, language, letter writing, and the textual inscription of identities) and material (pen, ink, paper and indeed the letter itself), and to remake them as tools of defiance, criticism, even resistance.

Like Hannah’s, therefore, many slaves’ letters may be read as interventions into a world which was barred to them, but not in the sense that their literacy and letter writing was itself forbidden, but rather because while many masters permitted and even encouraged or required this correspondence, they did so in the expectation that since they controlled the world they also controlled the word. Slave letter writers, on the other hand, frequently used their critical literacy in order to challenge the ordering of that world, and to contest the way in which the master discourse inscribed and circumscribed their identities, relationships and possibilities, their supposed self-perception and their perception of others. In so doing they might never truly “dismantle the master’s house” so much as mark its boundaries, but they nonetheless transgressed some of its closures and exploited some of its openings in order to construct their writing laboratories as discrete spaces within its walls.

Ultimately, however, they operated within social and cultural limits that were defined by their owners, and whether their manipulation of world and word were apparent to their masters is difficult to ascertain. What is clear, however, is that

¹⁸ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Steven Rendall (trans./ed.), (Berkeley, 1984), 135.

whatever meaning a letter had to a slave, their masters were capable of making it meaningful in ways which were perhaps very different. For instance, while we may not be able to tell whether Jefferson detected Hannah's wordplays, we know that he thought enough of the letter to keep it, and it is in fact the only example of a letter from Hannah that has entered the archives. Was it the only one he received from her? Since one is attempting to assess the significance of an absence it is hard to be sure, but the tone of the letter itself certainly seems to reveal Hannah as a correspondent who was at ease with the conventions of epistolary form, while her matter-of-fact opening suggests that this was not the first letter she had written to him detailing the situation at Poplar Forest.

Taken together, these issues suggest that it is a possibility (though not a certainty) that Hannah's letter is just one example of what may have been a rather fuller correspondence with Jefferson, a possibility which raises a significant question: why did he chose to keep this individual item and not others? Perhaps it was simply because he appreciated the sentiment, or perhaps because he took some pleasure in the performance and wished to keep the letter as a curiosity, but in either case the act of preservation speaks to the significance of the document, an insight that can be seen to hold true even if this was the only letter he received from her, since such choices are active and not passive, even if they may be compulsive. Nor need one imagine that this significance may only be found within the text, for the preservation may in fact mark the event of the correspondence as memorable rather than merely its content, thus producing potentially accretive effects on the meaning and significance of a given piece of correspondence; if for Hannah her words signified a level of defiance, to Jefferson the letter may have represented a confirmation of compliance. Thus through analysing these acts of preservation we may begin to perceive the cultural significance of slave letters, for the choices that masters (and indeed slaves) made about what to preserve were themselves meaningful and generative of meaning, and thus their archives may be read as embodiments of particular relationships of power and of sentiment which in turn

reflect on the archivist and the way in which they perceived themselves and their correspondents.

One thus arrives at an analytical framework that situates slaves' letters within the cultural and social contexts that shaped them whilst at the same time utilizing them, both as individual texts and as archival collections, to reveal the epistolary cultures about which masters' and slaves' interests articulated. In focussing attention on these twin aspects of epistolary culture – individual correspondents and items of correspondence on the one hand, archivists and their archives on the other – I am proposing that they be considered as interrelated conceptual spaces in which slaves and masters assembled competing yet articulated constructions of themselves, each other and their worlds. Indeed, just as it is profitable to consider the way in which the critically literate utilize their writing laboratories to take conceptual items (words, discourses) from outside, reconfigure their meaning and thus reconstruct the world and their place in the world, so too can we consider the creation of an archive – “archivization”¹⁹ – as a critical activity that occurs within the conceptual space (that is also an actual space) of the archival laboratory. Here, material items (documents, letters), containing and also embodying information about the world beyond the archive are ordered and catalogued in ways that make sense of that world and of the archivist's place within it.

Thus it is really the complex interplay between these epistolary practices – those of the letters' writers and those of the letters' archivists – that is the central concern of this thesis. For it is in these interactions that the nuances of negotiated meanings, contested identity constructions and rival discourses on the other were played out, transformed from individual letter exchanges into a complex of competing epistolary cultures which also provided the forums within which slaves

¹⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, (Chicago, 1996), Eric Prenowitz (trans.), 17.

and those that imagined themselves their owners waged their perpetual battle for control.

It is thus appropriate that rather than begin in the conventional manner of situating the argument by giving a historiographical review, this thesis situates itself by beginning with an analysis of what I have called the “imaginary archive of slaves’ letters,” which envisions what a collection containing only such items might look like and examines its parameters, its biases, what types of documents it would contain and what types might be conspicuous by their absence. Although to an extent this involves a quantitative assessment, (the statistical basis for which is to be found in Appendix I), the main focus will be on two issues. In the first place the purpose is to highlight the fact that, despite archival limitations which determine a temporal focus on the nineteenth century, there are strong continuities between the many letters that have survived from the period 1815-1865 and the few that predate this era, which in turn suggest that we might tentatively connect the epistolary cultures that developed in the nineteenth century to earlier instances of slave letter writing. This is followed by an examination of the historical practices of archivization that have led to the preservation of these archival materials, focussing in particular on the ideological and authoritarian functions that slaveholders’ archives served, for it is in these collections that the vast majority of slaves letters are to be found. Such an approach suggests that while the parameters of this thesis may have been determined by the shape of the archive, this was itself determined by historical developments, namely the transformation of slaveholding ideology and practice from the patriarchalism of the eighteenth century into the paternalism of the nineteenth. This analysis will therefore consider the way that changes over time and space have been critical in

determining our ability to historicize the epistolary cultures of slavery, for as Derrida has argued, “archivization produces as much as it records the event.”²⁰

Having situated the thesis in relation to the archive, Part Two then proceeds to position it in terms of the historiography. As I have already suggested, it is a peculiarity of contemporary slave history that slaves’ letters, as opposed to other forms of African American testimony (which have of course become a ubiquitous evidentiary reference point), are rarely cited, whilst epistolary culture, whether maintained by bondspeople or constructed by masters, merits almost no mention whatsoever. This absence is further problematized when one considers the fact that despite the marked changes in the historiographical orthodoxy with regard to slave personality, as an issue it has remained of central importance to the writing of slave history, in which case one might expect letters, which are generally treated as a useful source on such issues, to be at least as highly valued as the testimony of ex-slaves. Chapter Three therefore examines these developments and argues that the relative absence of interest in the slave letters may be understood as the product of particular historico-literary developments with regard to the Slave Narratives and interviews alongside a fashion (perhaps now past but still relevant in the establishment of tradition) for psychohistorical approaches which render slaves the objects as opposed to the subjects of research. Then, in Chapter Four, I argue that the specific ways in which slave personality has been conceptualized and the models that have been used to examine it have tended to predicate against dealing with such equivocal and ambiguous sources as slaves’ letters, given that almost without exception they are documents in which the presence of the “ubiquitous white” can be felt at every turn.²¹ The section therefore concludes by offering an alternative

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 17. NB: This section does not deal with the effects of modern archival practice, an issue which while of central importance with regards to the historian’s ability to access the past is perhaps of more general than specific importance and is thus relegated to Appendix II.

²¹ The phrase “the ubiquitous white man” is one that will be familiar to the expert reader, and is drawn from Stamp’s now famous attack on the value of slave testimony in which he asserted that, almost

approach to analysing personality that in turn suggests a more profitable approach to reading slaves' letters and epistolary culture and highlights some of the ways in which they might be situated within larger analyses of slave history.

An explicit aspect of this historiographical analysis is thus to highlight methodological, theoretical and ethical issues, particularly with regard to the historico-literary attention that has been paid to the Slave Narratives, and in Part Three I take these questions further by undertaking a case study of an individual letter. This close analysis draws out a variety of issues such as the problems of contextualizing the letters, many of which represent unique archival events in which an individual slave comes into brief and tantalizing focus before disappearing into historical obscurity. At the same time it highlights the problematic hermeneutic connection between letter writers on the one hand and readers (by which I mean to include both the direct recipients and historical or archival analysts) on the other, and so suggests particular ways of reading which are epistemologically open and sensitive to the slipperiness and contingency of meaning that this complex relationship must necessarily highlight. This section therefore stands as an example of the type of analysis I have attempted to apply and the ethical considerations that I have endeavoured to keep in mind when dealing with each letter and yet which cannot be foregrounded at every turn.

With these considerations in mind, Part Four moves the focus from individual letters to epistolary cultures and considers first the extent to which white fears of slave literacy and letter writing created powerful regimes of surveillance and discipline which served to curtail slaves' opportunities to write to one another or to keep hold of letters which attested to their ability to circumvent these controls. It thus

without exception, it must be considered as so compromised by the effects of white intercessors, be they abolitionists or masters, as to be virtually useless as a reflection of the genuine thoughts, feelings and experiences of slaves. Kenneth M. Stampp, 'Rebels and Sambos: The Search for the Negro's Personality in Slavery', *JSH*, XXXVII.3, (1971), 367-369.

proposes that what little evidence there is for a subversive epistolary culture within slavery might well be read as testifying to something rather more substantial. Based upon the few tantalizing glimpses that one can get of this culture via a few, often intercepted, letters within masters' archives as well as others that are reproduced or discussed in the Slave Narratives, it then goes on to examine why slaves may have chosen to preserve particular letters and to what uses they put them, thus returning to the idea that what is present in the archive (and indeed what is absent from it) may be read as signifiers of an epistolary culture that provided a venue for the negotiation and actualization of important aspects of identity.

The section then moves on to examine the other side of the coin, namely the way in which masters themselves constructed and utilised epistolary cultures as a way to augment their own practices of slave governance, and demonstrates that such practices had important implications in that they provided the legitimate epistolary culture with which slaves' own epistolary culture had to articulate, but at the same time constituted a practice of epistolary surveillance that facilitated slaveowners' construction of themselves as enlightened paternalists, or indeed as all-powerful patriarchs. We should not, however, imagine that this process was one-sided, and Chapter Nine therefore examines the ways in which the slaves that were implicated within this disciplinary structure attempted, and often managed, to utilize it for their own ends: while masters may have had the power to demand letters that confirmed the bonds of authority and sentiment that they imagined bound their slaves to them, where slaves understood this intimate practice of self-fashioning such knowledge could be put to good use in order to manipulate and manage their owners.

Overall, therefore, the thesis argues that situating slaves' letters within the epistolary cultures they and their masters constructed can profitably complicate our understanding of slaves and slavery. For under the guise of paternalism masters subjected almost every aspect of their slaves' lives to intrusive patriarchal interference and surveillance, yet did so in ways that inevitably involved slaves, even relied upon them, and thus created contexts in which these same African American

men and women could negotiate, manipulate and even challenge the identities that their owners constructed for themselves and for their bondpeople. Epistolary culture was one such context. Thus by examining how slaves were able to utilize it to effect tactics of resistance, whilst foregrounding the extent to which these tactics articulated with their masters' strategies of domination, the aim of this thesis is to open a conversation that may help to explain how slaves handled such discourses on self and other when they occurred in other contexts, from market related activity to leisure time, from forced labour to childrearing. While epistolary culture was just one context for these exchanges, and almost certainly an exclusive and exceptional one at that, it is nevertheless one to which the slaves' letters and their masters' archives give us considerable access.

With such an analysis comes an important corollary, however, because while slaveowners' attempts to draw slaves into the master discourse certainly did create opportunities for enslaved African Americans to manipulate, appropriate and subvert slaveholder ideology, their masters' strategies were also often successful, at least in their own terms. For however much letter writing enabled slaves to negotiate their position, the vast majority of their correspondence was conditional on their owners' intercession, enabled their intrusive surveillance, and could ultimately be appropriated by them (both conceptually and materially) and inserted into the authoritarian and sentimental archives of paternalism. But if epistolary culture was thus in one sense a trap, it was also an opportunity, and if slave letter writers rarely got the last word, they at least gained a chance to speak back to power.

Part One

Slaves' Letters in the Archives

Introduction

Imagining an Archive of Slaves' Letters

I have asked her for the letters; which, being her veritable biographer, I had a right to do; but she always tells me they are in a great box, with all the accumulated weight of her household stuff resting upon them. Now, dearest reader, if I can ever extract aught further touching this delicate and pleasing subject, I will not fail to make you acquainted with it; or if I can, by any persuasion, get a peep at any letters from the cousin afore-mentioned, I hereby pledge myself that you too shall be advised of their contents.

Frances H. Green, (1838)¹

Slaves' letters form but the smallest part of the evidential dataset from which historians of slavery can construct their histories and if one were to build an archive of slave letters, the process of cataloguing and classification would reveal them to be a diverse and often frustrating collection: some form series that span a number of years, others are unique; some were written by individuals whose history is well documented in plantation records and diaries, others were composed by slaves about whom we know nothing save for what their correspondence reveals.² They are thus perhaps not very different from many sources, although as we shall see they have been treated differently by many archivists and historians. Furthermore, while this imagined archive would thus represent a vastly underutilised resource it would probably also be incomplete since it is likely that many pieces of slave correspondence remain undiscovered and undocumented in public and private collections throughout the United States and beyond.³

¹ Frances H. Green, Elleanor Eldridge, *Memoirs of Elleanor Eldridge*, (Providence, 1838), (DocSouth, 2000), 32.

² While no such archive exists and must be imagined, there have been attempts to reconfigure conventional archives in such a way as to place sources such as the slave letters in the foreground rather than the background. For a discussion of the sometimes problematic relationship between what has been archived, how archival materials are ordered and presented, and the meanings that thus accrete to the contemporary archive, see Appendix 2.

³ Unsurprisingly, very few slave letters were sent to recipients outside of the United States, and even fewer of these have survived, and the only ones that I am aware of that have were written by Phillis Wheatley in the course of her negotiations with sponsors and publishers in Britain: PW to the

It is therefore useful to begin by briefly analysing the series of letters which set the parameters for the discussion and the range of letters, published and unpublished, that lie between these points, an analysis which demonstrates that despite the marked changes in context, there are distinct continuities between slave letters that predate American Independence and those written by and for bondspeople who lived to see the Civil War. By the same token, however, it is important to highlight the ways in which developments in slaveholding practice and ideology from those of the Revolutionary era patriarch to those of the Antebellum paternalist may be read in their changing archival habits, though even in this respect the fact that elements of continuity are also apparent suggests that the highly developed epistolary cultures of slavery revealed in the archives of the later Antebellum era have their roots in the limited epistolary culture of late eighteenth-century American slavery.

These are themes which are developed in the second chapter which examines questions regarding the construction of archives, for as has already been suggested, it is only through the archivization of slaves' letter that it becomes possible to historicize the event of their letter writing. These are questions that are developed in

Countess of Huntingdon, 25 October, 1770; 23 June, 1773; 17 July, 1773, Huntingdon Papers; PW to John Thornton, 21 April, 1772; 1 December, 1773; 29 March, 1774, Scottish Records Office; PW to the Right Hon'ble The Earl of Dartmouth &c &c &c, 10 October, 1772, Staffordshire Records Office, all in Phillis Wheatley, *Complete Writings*, Vincent Carretta (ed.), (London, 2001), 139-145, 149-151, 154-156, 158-160. There is strong evidence, however, that letters must indeed have been sent North into Canada and although these have not found their way into the archives, they are mentioned in the correspondence of the fugitives that made their homes there, correspondence which also suggests that letters were sent back to those still in bondage via the Underground Railroad. Amongst the letters written by fugitives living in Canada to William Still (a former slave who purchased his freedom and became a well known abolitionist orator and writer as well as a conductor on the Underground Railroad), are a number which requested him to forward correspondence to relatives and friends still in slavery and to facilitate their replies. See, for example John Clayton to WS, 6 March 1854; W.H. Atkins to WS, 4 August 1854; Nat Ambie to WS, 10 June 1858; Edmund Turner to WS, 1 March 1858. All in William Still, *The Underground Railroad: A Record of Facts, Authentic Narrative, Letters. &c., Narrating the Hardships, Hair-breadth Escapes and Death Struggles of the Slaves in their efforts of Freedom, as related by themselves and others, or witnessed by the author; together with sketches of some of the largest stockholders, and most liberal aiders and advisers, of the road*, (Philadelphia, 1872), 59, 213-214, 104, 119.

Part Four, in an analysis which suggests that the archives created by the recipients of slaves' letters may profitably be read as texts that testify to the conflicting yet mutually reinforcing cultures of surveillance that typified the epistolary cultures of slavery. Within the present analysis, therefore, the question is primarily dealt with at a theoretical level and by reference to the statistical biases of the entire collection, which relates the process of collecting letters to the larger historical framework, and thus helps to more precisely situate the epistolary cultures of American slavery in time and space.

Chapter One

Time, Space, and Epistolary Culture: The parameters of the archive

The actions of black people during the American Revolution, the Civil War, and the long years of bondage between these two cataclysmic events cannot be understood merely as a function of the dynamics of slavery or the possibilities of liberty, but must be viewed within the specific social circumstances and cultural traditions of black people. These varied from time to time and from place to place.

Ira Berlin, (1980)¹

The parameters of this thesis – 1815-1865 – are primarily the product of the shape of the archive. Whereas only 14 surviving letters written by enslaved people predate 1815, 355 postdate that year.² Having said this, however, the paucity of the archival record pre-1815 belies some important continuities in terms of the concerns of enslaved letter writers and the epistolary cultures within which they operated. Thus, although we must be circumspect in projecting the insights afforded by the letters from the later period onto an earlier era for which we have but few sources, it is nonetheless worthwhile acknowledging the extent to which the highly developed epistolary cultures of slavery that may be located in the later Antebellum period have antecedents in the late Colonial and early Republican eras. The following chapter therefore highlights similarities between two writers, Phillis Wheatley and Lucy Skipwith, whose letters form the start and endpoints of the entire imaginary archive, even if Wheatley's lie beyond the parameters of this thesis.³ As series, these letters

¹ Ira Berlin, 'Time, Space, and the Evolution of Afro-American Society on British Mainland North America', *AHR*, LXXXV.1, (1980), 78.

² In fact 27 letters written by African Americans who had experience of enslavement survive from the period 1770-1814. However, for the purpose of compiling statistics, letters written by slaves whose correspondence with masters or others continued after they became free have been excluded from the total number of slaves' letters. Nonetheless, since reading these letters from freedom highlights interesting tensions in those written from slavery, they form an important part of subsequent analyses. For a breakdown of the surviving letters by decade see Appendix 1, Table 4.

³ 22 of Phillis Wheatley's letters survive, at least 9 of which were written when she was a slave. They were addressed to various recipients including sponsors, friends and newspaper editors: PW to the Rt. Hon'ble the Countess of Huntingdon, 25 October 1770, through PW to Miss Obour Tanner Worcester, 10 May 1779, all in Wheatley, *Writings*. 139-63. There are also two variant copies of

are notable because each straddles an important historical disjuncture – Wheatley’s, the coming of Revolution, and Lucy’s, the coming of the Civil War – as well as a profound change in each woman’s life, namely their emancipation. A comparison of them is thus very revealing since it highlights strong continuities between each woman’s perspective on her enslavement, continuities which are quite striking given just how profoundly their historical experiences, social circumstances, and cultural traditions may have differed.

Before turning to this comparison, however, it is worth acknowledging that the first enslaved letter writer about whom we have any information is not in fact Wheatley but Ayuba Suleiman Diallo who is probably better known to students of American history by the name used in James Bluett’s narrative of his experiences, Job Ben Solomon. Written sometime in the early 1730s, the actual manuscript of the Diallo letter does not survive, and yet from what we know of it from Bluett’s description it might be seen as the prototypical example of a slave letter writer literally writing his self (back) into existence.⁴ Diallo was the son of a wealthy African merchant who had been captured and enslaved in a raid, sold to European traders and robbed of his identity, becoming not Ayuba Suleiman Diallo the African but Job the slave. His letter, written in Arabic, was intended for his father as a plea for help or ransom, and yet it ended up playing a pivotal role in Diallo’s remaking of self because it was his writing that marked him out as exceptional and so set in train

extant letters, PW to the Rt. Hon’ble the Countess of Huntingdon, 25 October 1770, and PW to ‘My Lord’, *New-York Journal*, 3 June 1773, all in *ibid.*, 163-64. 58 of Lucy Skipwith’s letters survive, all addressed to her master: LS to JHC, 17 August 1854 through 7 December 1865, *DMLSF*, 196-263.

⁴ Diallo’s letter is described in Thomas Bluett, *Some Memoirs of the Life of Job, the Son of Solomon, the High Priest of Boonda in Africa; Who was a Slave About Two Years in Maryland; and Afterwards Being Brought to England, was Set Free, and Sent to His Native Land in the Year 1734*, (London, 1736), 22-23, (DocSouth, 1999). On his return Africa, Diallo (signing himself “Job the Son of Solomon”) wrote a letter to Jacob Smith, drawing master at St Paul’s School, who Diallo had become acquainted with whilst he was in England. The letter itself falls outside the remit of the current project since it is a letter written by a freedman to a person who had no part in Diallo’s experience as a slave, but it would be interesting to compare it to the many letters written by freedpeople. Job Ben Solomon (Ayuba Suleiman Diallo) to Jacob Smith, 27 January 1735/36, *ST*, 5-6.

the course of events that would eventually see him freed and returned to Africa: as Henry Louis Gates, Jr. puts it, Diallo “virtually ‘wrote’ his way from bondage to freedom.”⁵

The last piece of correspondence, by contrast, forms the final item in the largest series of letters from any one slave, and was written to Lucy Skipwith’s ex-master, John Hartwell Cocke. As the only surviving letter from Lucy that postdates her emancipation it is in itself a very interesting document, but to compare this entire archival sub-series with the fascinating yet frustrating absent presence of the Diallo letter, if we cannot say that Lucy wrote her way from bondage to freedom, she is nonetheless representative of the ways in which slave letter writers wrote of themselves in bondage in ways that created a conceptual space where there was a measure of freedom for them to constructively utilize their critical literacy. In any case, it also seems just to end with a letter from a freedperson.

And yet, as fitting and ironic as it may be to frame an imagined archive of enslaved correspondence with a slave authored letter which no longer exists and a letter from a woman who was no longer a slave, in terms of constructing a statistical analysis we need more concrete and justifiable parameters. Thus, while Lucy Skipwith’s letters still provide a reasonable endpoint for this study (although if one were to construct a sequentially ordered archive of slaves’ letters then between the final letter she penned as a slave, dated 31 May 1864, and the letter of 7 December 1865 there would be a significant number of other letters, many of which attest to the increasing uncertainty and difficulty of slaves’ lives in the final throes of the Civil War), the starting point for this exercise is provided by a letter from the aforementioned Phillis Wheatley, dated 25 October 1770.⁶ Like Lucy, Wheatley is

⁵ Gates, *Signifying*, 148. Cf. Nell Irving Painter, *Creating Black Americans: African American History and its Meanings, 1619 to the Present*, (Oxford, 2006), 25-27.

⁶ PW to the Rt. Hon’ble the Countess of Huntingdon, 25 October 1770, Wheatley, *Writings*, 129.

another slave for whom there is considerable contextual detail and who wrote a series of letters which span the gulf between slavery and freedom.⁷ Beyond this, however, there is another reason why she makes so apt a comparator, not only for Lucy Skipwith but also for the other enslaved letter writers under discussion: since this thesis is not only concerned with slave letters, but also with the way in which slaves' literacy (and/or exploitation of literate others), enabled them to engage with and critique a discourse from which they were socially, culturally, and oftentimes legally barred, to begin with an African American whose literacy was effectively put on trial seems more than appropriate.

This 'trial' took place in 1772 when Wheatley had to face a panel of eighteen of the great and good of Boston which assembled in order to determine whether or not her poems were her own work – a “Negro poetess” was, after all, an extraordinary thing.⁸ This panel of powerful white males included Thomas Hutchinson, the Governor of Massachusetts, and his Lieutenant Governor, Andrew Oliver. There were also a number of ministers including Reverend Samuel Mather, son of Cotton Mather, and Reverend Mather Byles, his nephew. Also in attendance were James Bowdoin, a leading American intellectual and future governor of Massachusetts and his rival John Hancock, who by this time was already a hero of the Sons of Liberty and would go on to be president of the Continental Congress and the first Governor of the Commonwealth. Together they concluded that Wheatley

⁷ It is unknown exactly when Wheatley was manumitted, but in a letter to David Worcester dated 18 October 1773 she refers to gaining her freedom on her return from England: “Since my return to America my Master, has as the desire of my friends in England given me my freedom” [*ibid.*, 147]. However, when an extract from her letter to Rev. Samson Occom was published in the *Connecticut Gazette*, on 11 March 1774, it was prefaced with the comment: “The following is an extract of a Letter from Phillis, a Negro Girl of Mr. Wheatley’s, in Boston,” [PW to Rev. Samson Occom, 11 February 1774, *Connecticut Gazette*; and the *Universal Intelligencer*, 11 March 1774, *ibid.*, 152, emphasis added]. Despite Wheatley going to lengths to ensure that his slave’s freedom was secure, therefore, it was either ignored, forgotten or unthinkable just six months later.

⁸ *The London Packet*, 13 September 1773, in Mukhtar Ali Isani, ‘The Contemporaneous Reception of Phillis Wheatley: Newspaper and Magazine Notices during the Years of Fame, 1765-1774’, *JNH*, Vol. 85, No. 4. (Autumn, 2000), 263.

was indeed the author of her poetry, an affirmation that then formed the key authorizing text for the 1773 publication of a book of her poems entitled, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, although it is worth noting that many in America remained sceptical, amongst them Thomas Jefferson who remarked: “[N]ever yet could I find a black had uttered a thought above the level of plain narration... Religion indeed has produced a Phillis Whately [sic]; but it could not produce a poet.”⁹

An interesting coincidence, however, makes a comparison of Phillis and Lucy a profitable way to begin this study, for in their literacy and education one can also argue that they had something rather profound in common, namely the fact that were both the products of white experiments in black literacy. Certainly, Lucy did not become a poet (so far as we know) and nor did Phillis run a plantation school, or even reside on a plantation, but despite their very different upbringings, experiences, and environments, both were educated in ways that were essentially experimental.¹⁰ For Wheatley’s owners, John and Susannah Wheatley and their twin children Mary and Nathaniel, the experiment consisted of the transformation of a newly imported African slave girl into the facsimile of an Anglo American ‘lady’, and while her education may not have begun with this intention, as her fame as a curiosity grew, so did the view of her as an experimental creation that needed to be measured, tested, and reviewed – hence the examination of her literacy and creativity. Furthermore, that interest in her coincided with Atlantic World debates over ‘race’ and reason strongly attests to her status as an experimental object that could help prove or

⁹ For an analysis of Wheatley’s ‘trial’ and the scepticism with which her literacy and writing was treated see Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Trials of Phillis Wheatley: America’s First Black Poet and Her Encounters with the Founding Fathers*, (New York, 2003), 7-16, 27-31. Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Frank Shuffleton (ed./int.), (New York, 1999), in *ibid.*, 44.

¹⁰ Having said this, one of Lucy’s letters to Cocke does contain a ten verse poem based on the ten commandments which she asked him to have “printed for me in a small track.” Whilst perhaps not great poetry, this inclusion probably pleased Cocke a great deal as it demonstrated both Lucy’s piety and her command of literacy in one fell swoop. LS to JHC, 31 August 1857, *DMLSF*, 214-216.

disprove the developing racialized discourse of the Enlightenment. We should thus be unsurprised that as they discussed the (in)equality of humankind, men of the Republic of Letters such as Voltaire and Jefferson should have referred to Phillis Wheatley by name.¹¹

But in the minds of white men such as Jefferson and his slaveholding inheritors this debate was not going to be resolved by the example Wheatley made of herself, and instead it slowly metamorphosed as American slavery's nineteenth-century opponents and defenders sought out arguments and examples to defeat one another, with some of them, such as the slaveholder and founder member of the ACS John Hartwell Cocke, going so far as to experiment with education even as Southern law and custom made such practices increasingly difficult. For Cocke, however, education was key, and Hopewell plantation, Alabama, where Lucy Skipwith eventually served as schoolmistress, was itself a grand experiment in which he sought to utilize education and religious indoctrination to transform slaves from what he saw as a dependent, debased, immoral, and superstitious caste into civilized beings who would be fitting vessels to transport his version of American morality and religiosity to Africa. As a child Lucy had proved to be his wife Louisa's best student amongst the slave children the couple had educated at Bremond, their Virginia plantation, and so when in the 1840s Cocke's ambitious plans led him to establish Hopewell as a stepping stone to Liberia in which slaves would learn to manage themselves with a minimum of supervision, it was with high hopes that he relocated Lucy and her family there. Away from his surveillance, however, and now in her teens, she proved to be somewhat less than the morally upstanding woman Cocke

¹¹ For a discussion of the enlightenment development the coterminous concepts of race and reason see, for instance, David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and The Politics of Meaning*, (Malden, 2002; 1993), 1-12, 27-36; Richard H. Popkin, 'The Philosophical Bases of Modern Racism', in *idem*, *The High Road to Pyrrhonism*, Richard A. Watson, James E. Force (eds.), (Indianapolis, 1993), 79-102. For the way in which Wheatley's "genius" became an obvious focus for these debates see Gates, *Trials*, 33, 40-50.

expected her to be and over the next few years bore three children out of wedlock, the first, Betsey, to Elam Tanner, the white overseer at Hopewell, the second, Maria and third, Dinah, to unnamed "Southern Gentlemen."¹²

And yet between 1850, when Dinah was born, and 1854, when the surviving letters of Lucy's correspondence with her master begin, Hopewell appears to have worked a significant transformation on her, as Randall Miller observes:

Once rebuked by Cocke as the 'vilest sinner' on the plantation, the gifted and comely Lucy repented of her abandoned youth to become for Cocke 'the Christian Matron' of his 'school for ultimate Liberian freedom.' He respected her warm Christian devotion and, as he explained to his son Cary Charles Cocke in 1858, he consequently valued her more highly 'than any other on the place.' ... For her part, she acted as a counterweight to the white overseer and was expected to report his activities to Cocke. She also functioned as a vehicle for the transmission of Cocke's evangelical Protestantism and his puritan work ethos, values she shared.¹³

Whether it was the regime at Hopewell (which itself transformed dramatically after 1851 when Lucy's apparently alcoholic father was removed as its overseer and relocated with his wife and young son to Mississippi),¹⁴ which worked this change on Lucy and whether she became the person Cocke thought he had created and which, as we shall see, she was quite prepared to present herself as, are all issues to which I return below. Suffice it to say for the moment that even as his Hopewell experiment appeared to fail in almost every respect, in Cocke's eyes his Lucy remained the experiment that succeeded and was thus both his example *par excellence* and amongst the prime agents upon whom his plans to salvage his project depended.

¹² *DMLSF*, 34-37, 145, 150-151.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 184. The task of analysing the extent to which Lucy shared Cocke's values and the extent to which she presented a face that she knew would be pleasing to her master and therefore ensure her continued power and status at Hopewell is not a simple one, and is further explored below. For the moment, however, I would suggest that while she may have shared some of his views and values, the practice of her everyday life and the sum of her writings suggest that her ideology was situated in her own experience and knowledge and not simply a facsimile of his.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 152.

Thus, although their lives were separated by a temporal gulf that saw many profound transformations not only of the country but also of the institution in which they lived, and by spatial differences and distances which ensured that Phillis' experiences of slavery were in many respects the antithesis of Lucy's, both can be seen to share this quality of having been experimental projects, at least in the eyes of their owners and critics. But such an objectification did not, in fact, create dependent objects but instead created opportunities for independent subjects to exert their own agency and conduct their own experiments with identity and power, and here again one can see striking similarities between these two. In Wheatley's poem 'To the University of Cambridge, in New-England', for instance, written when she was only about fifteen years old, one can see her deploying subtle ironic inversions of the prevailing discourses of 'race', gender, and status in order to critique those who could only have comprehended her as their inferior, staking claim to her identity as an "Ethiop" only recently come from the "land of errors" even as she positioned herself as advisor to the students, cautioning these future worthies and divines to shun sin:

Ye blooming plants of human race divine,
An Ethiop tells you 'tis your greatest foe;
Its transient sweetness turns to endless pain,
And in immense perdition sinks the soul.¹⁵

Lucy's appropriation of the power that Cocke's experimentation had placed in her hands took a different form however, one that reveals her as being emphatically not the Lucy Skipwith he had hoped to create but instead an independent and determined woman who would use her education and her skills as an educator to shape her own life, just as Wheatley showed herself to be more than a curiosity on whose fame her owners could trade. As we have seen, as a younger

¹⁵ PW, 'To the University of Cambridge, in New-England,' *Writings*, 12. Carretta describes Wheatley as "appropriat[ing] the persona of authority or power normally associated with men and social superiors," and as speaking "as a teacher to students or a minister to his flock," but surprisingly does not take note of how much more profoundly she was challenging her status considering that she was not only female but also both a slave and an African. *Ibid.*, xxi.

woman Lucy was more than simply a pliant object in Cocke's schemes, and while for a period she may have seemed to be the embodiment of her master's ambitions, the tension between his view of her (in which his view of himself as benefactor no doubt loomed large) and her own self perception must have become strikingly apparent to him when Cocke received a reply to a letter he wrote to her on 14 October 1865 – the letter of 7 December 1865 to which I referred above. His missive does not survive, but was apparently an offer to transport Lucy (along with the other Hopewell residents) to Liberia, in its author's eyes a no doubt magnanimous gesture. But to Lucy it seems to have presented an opportunity to repudiate his whole scheme, and her response suggests that even his star pupil had not internalized his values nor learned his ideals, even if she had shared some of them, and that now, given the choice, she would use her education for her own ends rather than his:

This is a letter returned to below in Chapter Five since it raises significant questions about the constitution of the epistolary self, but at this point I should like to note three features of it beyond Lucy's rejection of Cocke's offer. First the date of the letter itself is striking, falling as it does just one day after the final ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment, four days after Alabama's ratification of it, and while she introduces her own missive by apologizing for how long she has taken to reply and blaming this on delays in the post, the coincidence of these dates is striking given that her letter is so concerned with what she will do with her freedom. Second, Lucy informed Cocke that she had split with her husband Armstead because "I have lived a life of trouble with him, & a white man has ever had to Judge between us, & now be turned loose from under a master, I know that I could not live with him in no peace.... if you have any hard feelings against me on the subject, I hope that you will forgive me for Jesus sake," a comment which not only repudiates Cocke's morality but also serves as a profound critique of his slave management. Third, she told him of her plans as a freedwomen, writing "I have been thinking of putting up a large

School next year as I can do more at that than I can at any thing elce, & I can get more children that I can teach, but I do not know yet whither I will be at liberty to do so or not.”¹⁶

This then, was Cocke’s dream turned on its head: rather than participate in his scheme to separate black from white by sending his slaves to Liberia, here they were planning their futures in America whilst even Lucy, rather than carry the light of religion, morality, and education to Africa, was planning to stay and use her education for herself and her fellow African Americans. Her apparent adoption of his moral code was thus revealed to have been more enforced than internalized and her relationship with God shown to be constructed on her terms and not on Cocke’s fundamentalism; like Phillis, Lucy was not the object her owner had hoped to perfect with religion, morality, and education but a knowing subject who took what she needed from each to shape her own self both within and beyond the contingencies of her life as a slave.

This letter also speaks to a further similarity between Lucy and Phyllis, namely their responses to freedom, a shared set of concerns that makes their correspondence a fitting frame in which to set the imaginary archive of slave letters. For where Lucy was making plans for her own future, reading her intentions against the first surviving letter of the emancipated Phillis Wheatley highlights an important point that we should note, in that each recognized the liminality of black liberty in a white country:

[Boston, October 18th, 1773]¹⁷

Sir, [*Col. David Worcester*]

Having an opportunity by a Servant of Mr, Badcock’s who lives near you, I am glad to hear you and your family are well.

....

¹⁶ LS to JHC, 7 December 1865, *DMLSF*, 262.

¹⁷ PW to Col. David Worcester 18 October, 1773, Wheatley, *Writings*, 147.

Since my return to America my Master, has at the desire of my friends in England given me my freedom. The Instrument is drawn, so as to secure me and my property from the hands of Exectutrs.[,] administrators, &c. of my master, and secure whatsoever Should be given me as my Own.

....

I expect my books which are published in London in [the vessel commanded by] Capt. Hall, who will be here I believe in 8 or 10 days. I beg the favour that you would honour the enclos'd Proposals, & use your interest with Gentlemen & Ladies of your acquaintance to subscribe also, for the more subscribers there are, the more it will be for my advantage as I am to half the Sale of the Books. This is the more Solicitous for, as I am now upon my own footing and whatever I get by this is entirely mine, and it is the Chief I have to depend upon. I must also request you would desire the Printers in New Haven, not to reprint that Book, as it will be a great hurt to me, preventing any further Benefit that I might receive from the sale of my Copies from England. The price is 2/6d Bound or 2/Sterling sewed. – If any should be so ungenerous as to reprint them the Genuine Copy may be known, for it is sign'd in my own handwriting. My dutiful respects attend your Lady and Children and I am

ever respectfully your oblig'd Huml. Sert.

Phillis Wheatley

Clearly the circumstances which led to each woman's freedom were quite different: for Wheatley it was primarily the product of her writing (and like Diallo I think one can appropriately say that she virtually wrote her way from bondage to freedom), whereas for Skipwith, freedom came with the Union's defeat of the Confederacy. Yet comparing these expressions of their thoughts on freedom it appears that both were concerned with similar problems; not only were they both planning their futures and ensuring their livelihoods now that they found themselves each "upon [their] own footing" but both harboured suspicions that freedom might be less than it seemed. This concern led Wheatley to secure legal documents to ensure that what "whatsoever is given me as my Own" remained so, and to ask Worcester to make certain that her intellectual property rights would be protected, whilst Lucy's fear that she would not be "at liberty" to run her planned school was a justifiable one given just how much of a struggle it would be for freedpeople to retain control over their education during and after Reconstruction.¹⁸

¹⁸ In the aftermath of Emancipation, freedpeople's attempts to control their own educational institutions were met with interference from many of their Northern white supporters (who had their own agenda), and with obstruction from many Southerners who saw the education of freed African

Despite being separated by both time and space, then, and despite living in Americas that were socially, culturally, and politically very different, Wheatley and Skipwith nonetheless had much in common, not least of which were their relationships with their masters, each of whom seem to have regarded them in somewhat of a Pygmalionesque way and also, like Henry Higgins, seem to have found their creations to be somewhat less malleable than they had perhaps hoped. Given that the concerns of this thesis are to utilize slaves' letters to examine the ways in which enslaved people saw themselves and thought about slavery and freedom, the striking similarities in Lucy and Phillis' epistolary responses to their divergent situations are significant. In the first place, they suggest that, despite the great gulfs of time and space that separate a first generation Bostonian slave who was the victim of the first Middle Passage from an Alabamian school ma'am who was the victim of the second, both faced the same challenges to their freedom to create themselves and utilised their literacy to effect similar tactics of resistance to others' powers to make them. Second, this comparison also demonstrates the ways in which the differing epistolary cultures in which each operated (the one corresponding with a transatlantic *literati* which sometimes even acknowledged her membership, the other with her master who rarely even acknowledged her equal claim to humanity), constituted conceptual spaces in which they could conduct critically literate experiments with self construction. If the personal concerns and literary tactics of enslaved letter writers as different as Wheatley and Skipwith are comparable, then while the limitations of the archival record may require a close focus on the nineteenth century, we should at the same time acknowledge that even as the practice, or at least ideology, of slaveowning was undergoing profound changes, the experience of being owned and the challenges this posed to the construction, maintenance, and sustenance of self may not have been.

Americans as no less threatening (and of no more pressing importance) than they had perceived the education of slaves to be. Williams, *Self-Taught*, 80-125, *passim*.

Chapter Two

Archives of Paternalism: Collecting Slaves' Letters

The central feature of paternalism is often misunderstood as an affection that bound masters and slaves. But paternalism was less about love than about the depth and intimacy of the masters' intrusion into the lives of the people they owned. The tendency of the paternal impulse was to intervene everywhere.

Kenneth S. Greenberg, (1996)¹

If the contents of slaves' letters reveal that their concerns were similar across time, space and place, the same cannot be said for their masters' collections of them which might justifiably be described as archives of paternalism. Moreover, while it is rare to find letter collections of this type that predate 1815, thus necessitating a focus upon the era 1815-1865, this archival effect also reflects the fact that significant changes in slaveholding practice and ideology took place during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, changes that sometimes resulted in the development of the twinned epistolary and archival cultures that are the subject of this chapter. For instance, while John Hartwell Cocke was certainly a somewhat compulsive archivist, his collection of letters from his slaves and ex-slaves nonetheless formed a significant aspect of an overall project that testified to his self-construction as a reluctant slaveholder whose missionary zeal and almost philanthropic interest in the betterment of his slaves was reflected back at him by an archive of correspondence which must have constantly reassured him of his selfless commitment to their moral and religious development.² As such Cocke's archivization of Lucy's letters effectively transformed them from a collection of individual missives detailing

¹ Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Honour & Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, The Proslavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South*, (Princeton, 1996), 46.

² In a bibliographical comment on the two separate Cocke archives at UVA, The Cocke Papers and the Bremond Recess Papers, Frank Grizzard suggests that Cocke suffered from a "seeming inability to throw away even the most insignificant piece of paper". Frank Edgar Grizzard, Jr., "'A Perilous and Grievous Burden': The Dilemma of the Antislavery Slaveholder In Virginia during the Early National Period: A Case Study of General John Hartwell Cocke of Bremond." Masters Thesis, University of Virginia 1989, <<http://etext.virginia.edu/jefferson/grizzard/thesis>>, viewed 16 October, 2005.

events at Hopewell into a mirror in which he could see and style himself, admire his relationship to her and hers to him, examine her dependence and dependability and the bonds of authority and sentiment that bound him to this exemplary slave, and that bound her to her surely beloved master. In short, Cocke's archive of slaves' and ex-slaves' letters was on the one hand the material and conceptual embodiment of his view of himself as an ideal, if reluctant, Antebellum paternalist whilst on the other it constructed his slaves as idealized (though often flawed and disappointing) products of his enlightened slaveholding.³

Of course such sentimentalism was not an exclusively nineteenth-century phenomenon, and there are earlier instances within the archives which reveal that eighteenth-century patriarchs similarly sought to construct the master/slave relationship in these idealized terms. For instance, in 1776 Lucy Marks received the following missive from a slave who signed himself "Uncle Paul," an item which she and her descendents chose to keep and may now be found in the archives of the Lewis, Anderson and Marks families at the University of Virginia, a set of successive acts of preservation that speak to the significance attached to this apparently spontaneous expression of affection from a slave (which actually represents the voices of a slave community) at a crucial time in American History:

³ *DMLSF*, 23-36 discusses Cocke's views on slaveholding and colonization and the ways in which these related to his faith and his patriotism.

April 6th 1776April [sic]⁴Dear Madam [*Lucy Marks*]

I take This oppertu-nity to inform you that I am well and I hope you are in the same [...] and I will be much oblig to you if you wil Will write to me by the firs<t> opportunity and wor how issabella and all the rest of the family [...] suzy de-sired to be remembered her father and all the family [...] [easter?] desired to be remembered to gr-andmother an sister and all the family [...] [naney?] desired to be remembered to cousin suzy

I remain your most affectionate

uncle paul

While this letter can stand as the prototypical example of the letter to a master that is in fact a conduit for messages to and from other slaves, as such it is also exemplary of the way in which keeping such letters must have served to remind slaveholders of the bonds of affection that they imagined to exist between themselves and their slaves, an idealisation which in at least some cases must had its reflection in reality, albeit a partial and contingent one.⁵ For the eighteenth century, however, it is a rarity not only as an archived expression of sentiment between bondsperson and mistress, nor solely because it is the first archived instance of a multi-vocal message, but simply because so few letters between slaves and their owners survive, and we should remember that Ayuba Suleiman Diallo wrote not to his master but to his father, while if Phillis Wheatley ever wrote to any of the Wheatley family the letters were not kept.⁶ While to an extent this might be explained by lower literacy rates

⁴ Uncle Paul to Lucy Marks, 6 April 1876, Lewis, Anderson and Marks Families Papers, UVA.

⁵ For letters that seem to testify to genuine bonds of affection see, for instance, Cynthia to Louisa Alexander, ND, Alexander and Hillhouse Family Papers, SHC.UNC-CH; Sophia No Body [Amis] to Sallie Amis and Elizabeth Amis, 7 June 1858, Elizabeth Hooper Blanchard Papers, SHC.UNC-CH; Ellin Davis to Anna Heard, 22 October 1865, Stephen D. Heard Papers, SHC.UNC-CH; James Paige to Miss Harriet Parkhill, 15 July 1859 and 22 August 1859, John Parkhill [James Paige] Papers, SHC.UNC-CH. These last two are particularly notable in that Paige continued to write to Parkhill after emancipation, a correspondence from which seven letters survive, the first dated 17 February 1866, the last 18 April 1875.

⁶ The issue of multivocality is an important one, and applies to many slaves' letters, and indeed masters' letters that contain messages from slaves. In some cases these consist of separately signed and/or addressed messages (and as well as representing many writers a single missive could be intended for multiple readers), in others of a single coherent text to which all correspondents sign their names, and the 369 letters that make up the entire collection actually contain 433 separately addressed

amongst slaves, it also attests to the ways in which the ideological underpinnings of slavery and the articulation of such theories in practice changed and developed between the Revolutionary and Antebellum eras.

This transformation is a subject I return to below in Part Four, but in terms of understanding the shape of archive and the ways in which the epistolary and archival cultures of slavery may be situated in terms of continuity and change over time, it is therefore important to recognize that Cocke's archival practice, and indeed his utilisation of Lucy (and before her, her father) as correspondents who would report upon the situation at Hopewell, are artefacts of nineteenth-century paternalism.⁷ As an ideology this qualified authoritarianism with sentimentality in order to domesticate the institution of slavery. In practice it meant qualifying brutality with rather subtler disciplinary strategies, which for a minority of slaveholders included

or signed messages. A particularly striking example of this is to be found in a letter written by Sarah Brownrigg Sparkman to her brother Richard Thomas Brownrigg, 4 November 1835, Brownrigg Papers, SHC.UNC-CH, a letter between slaveholders that contains what its author described as a "medly" of messages from six individual slaves which are addressed to various members of their families: David Brownrigg's and Arthur Holly's messages were both intended for their wives and children; Rose and her children's was intended for their father, Hardy; Mary's for Cherry, her mother, and for her grandmother; Sandy's for his wife Ani; Grace's for her mother and sister. For examples directly from slaves' letters see for instance: Hannah Valentine and Lethe Jackson to Mary Campbell, 2 May 1838, Campbell Family Papers, DUKE; Susan [Sukey] and Ersey to Beverley Tucker, 24 October 1842, *ST*, 13-14; Alfred Payne and Mary Higgins to William Forkner, 23 November 1848, *MON*, 95-96; Henry, Lizzy, Moses, and Malica [Malachi] White to WSP, 5 July 1856, Pettigrew Papers; Jefferson McCauly to 'My dear Master', April 7 1863, GLC-NY, which contains messages for McCauly's wife, brother, mother, his wife's master, and his master's daughter.

⁷ The crucial text with regard to paternalism remains Genovese's *Jordan* and although his thesis has certainly been criticized and adapted over the years, it remains a masterful elucidation of the complex social relations in Antebellum slavery. The current discussion, however, does not assume that actual relationships between masters and slaves were paternalistic, but rather that the ideology that Genovese describes provided some slaveholders with idealizations of themselves. As such these were self-images that sought recognition and reflection, and could thus be exploited and manipulated by slaves in manifold ways, even as they shaped the ways in which at least some masters not only governed their slaveholdings but memorialised this governance in their archives. Cf. Oakes, *Ruling*, 192-224, whose discussion of the "rhetoric" of paternalism provides a useful measure of the way in which over the Antebellum period paternalist ideology became increasingly attractive to those that sought to counter criticism, assuage their own guilt, or construct themselves as somewhat more enlightened and less barbaric than their fellows, even as increasing commercialization made paternalist practice increasingly rare.

the strategic utilisation of slave correspondents to augment their powers of surveillance; for an even smaller number of masters, collecting such correspondence served to symbolize their transformation. This is not to suggest that such masters were innovative in delegating authority to 'privileged' slaves, of course.⁸ In this respect their management style merely reflected the practice of many planter-paternalists, since there were ideological benefits to the marginalization (so far as this was possible), of white overseers, whether or not the master in question then corresponded with the African Americans they replaced them with. For men such as Cocke, however, engaging such slaves in correspondence enabled them to further distance themselves from the unpleasantness of slave management, and even to construct a kind of absentee paternalism whereby they governed their plantations and their slaves via epistolary means for much of the year.⁹

⁸ I have borrowed the concept of the 'privilege' utilized here from Robert Starobin's 'Privileged Bondsmen and the Process of Accommodation: The Role of Houseservants and Drivers as Seen in Their Own Letters', *JSocH*, V.1, (1971), 46-70, although it is problematic because by allowing master-defined 'privilege' to dominate the analysis it runs the risk of failing to acknowledge two inter-related issues: first, that what slaveowners thought of as 'privileging' may well have been the opposite, since it is arguable that such slaves may have been isolated, mistrusted, perhaps even ostracized by slave communities; second, that slaves' own perception of what really made them *privileged* might be entirely different and relate to alternate criteria than those imagined to be important by their owners. In order to distinguish between 'privileged' treatment of another and *privilege* as something possessed, therefore, I denote this difference in my text by using 'privilege', 'privileged', or 'privileges' to indicate the former, and by using *privilege*, *privileged*, or *privileges* to indicate the latter.

⁹ Many whites habitually made overseers the scapegoats for the violence inherent in slave management, and thus increasingly depended upon slave foremen and drivers to occupy positions between white overseers and black slaves, sometimes replacing them altogether. Such a solution had potentially great advantages since black on black governance often resulted in less brutal yet equally efficient regimes, while were such 'privileged' slaves to be especially violent in punishing their fellows, it no longer reflected upon the slaveholding race but upon the brutishness of the 'Negro'. For instance, in 1826 Judge Charles Tait and his son James Asbury Tait dismissed the two white men who had overseen their vast Alabama estates for so brutally mismanaging the 180 slaves who worked there as to make the entire population rebellious and unruly. The final straw came when they threatened to shoot two slaves for disobedience, which resulted in these two taking flight and a general breakdown of order and authority. The overseers were replaced by a slave named Hartford who successfully managed the plantation for the Taites until at least 1842, and whom the Taites managed via correspondence. Hartford to Judge Charles Tait, 6 November 1836, *BIB*, 36-37. For analyses that explore the invidious role of the white overseer and the ways in which masters often deployed them as

In terms of the shape of the archive, the significance of these 'privileged' slaves is statistically apparent in a variety of ways. For instance, more than a third of the total of 369 letters that make up the entire collection are to be found in three large series consisting of letters to the absentee paternalists John Hartwell Cocke, William S. Pettigrew and James Cathcart Johnston whose plantation archives contain 78, 45 and 35 slaves' letters respectively.¹⁰ Moreover, a host of similar relationships are revealed by the archival presence of many smaller series of letters from 'privileged' bondspeople whose correspondence various masters chose to preserve.¹¹ Overall, such collections make up nearly half of all the surviving slaves' letters, a fact that reveals the importance masters' slave letter archives had as sites of power/knowledge, a theoretical concept that situates the current analysis and which has important implications that need some elucidation.

In suggesting that slaveholders' archives should be viewed as spaces wherein items of knowledge entered by the master-archivist exert effects of power over subjects, I am drawing on the ideas of Michel Foucault, and in particular on his

the executors of punishment as a means to distance themselves from such unpleasantness whilst simultaneously holding them in contempt for their brutality, venality and carnality see for instance Genovese, *Jordan*, 12-22; James Oakes, *Slavery and Freedom: An Interpretation of The Old South*, (New York, 1990), 21-22; *idem.*, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders*, (New York, 1998; 1982), 174-175. Cf. Charles G. Steffen, 'In Search of the Good Overseer: The Failure of the Agricultural Reform Movement in Lowcountry South Carolina, 1821-1834', *JSH*, LXIII.4. (1997), 753-802; William E. Wiethoff, 'Enslaved Africans' Rivalry with White Overseers in Plantation Culture: An Unconventional Interpretation', *JBS*, XXVI.3, (2006), 429-455.

¹⁰ As well as Lucy's letters see: GS to JHC, 11 May 1847, through 10 November 1850, (21 items), *DMLSF*, 153-182. Henry, Lizzy, Moses, and Malica [Malachi] White to WSP, 5 July 1856, through Moses to WSP, 9 October 1858, (45 items), Pettigrew Papers, SHC.UNC-CH. Sam to JCJ, 8 July 1813; Peter to JCJ 5 April 1850, through 17 July 1859, (25 items); Aaron to JCJ, 23 July 1850, through 4 July 1851, (8 items); Nexcon Johnston to JCJ, 26 June 1859; Mary to JCJ, 1 October 1850; Eliza Johnston to JCJ, 1 October 1850, Hayes Collection, SHC.UNC-CH.

¹¹ See for instance: PA to StGT, 14 September 1807 and 27 September 1819; RE to LTC, 29 May 1825, and 17 October 1826; JH to NBT, 16 November 1834, *ST*, 9-13. Hartford to Judge Charles Tait, 6 November 1836; Catoe [sic] to CCJ, 3 March 1851 and 3 September 1852; Andrew to CCJ, 10 September 1852; *BIB*, 47-55. Ben Stevens Eliot to William Elliot, 11 November 1848; Isaac Stevens to William Elliot, 22 October 1849, Elliot & Gonzales Papers, UNC-CH; Finn Arrington to Archibald Hunter Arrington, 3 December 1860 and 10 December 1860, Archibald Hunter Arrington papers UNC-CH.

analysis of modernity and the disciplinary strategies by which modern power becomes hegemonic. For Foucault, of course, slavery was an inherently pre-modern power relationship, since the extraction of labour depended upon the direct “appropriation of bodies” which he contrasted with the “elegance of the discipline [which] lay in the fact that it could dispense with this costly and violent relation by obtaining effects of utility at least as great.” I would suggest, however, that whilst American slavery, like other slaveries, was ultimately dependant upon such forceful “appropriation” it did not, indeed could not operate solely on the basis of the threat of punishment. Instead its smooth functioning required precisely the kinds of “micro-physics of power” which Foucault envisions as central to the modern world, such as the ordering of time (“The control of activity”) and space (“The art of distributions”), the close surveillance of the individual (“Hierarchical observation”), or the construction of a discriminated workforce (“The composition of forces”).¹² If we accept, as Scott argues in a development of these Foucauldian themes, that the “builders of the modern... do not merely describe, observe, and map; they strive to shape a people and landscape that will fit their techniques of observation” and that “there are virtually no other facts for the state than those that are contained in documents,” then the archive itself lies at the heart of this totalizing endeavour, a project which was also indubitably modernist.¹³

It is therefore also worth noting that Foucault’s conceptualization of slavery as pre-modern coincides with debates, both contemporary and historical, over the issue of the South’s modernity since it begs the question of whether the Southern commitment to slavery as a means of social control retarded its progress from pre-capitalist relations of power to bourgeois capitalism, or whether it was in fact a

¹² Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of The Prison*, Alan Sheridan (trans.), (London, 1977; 1975), 24-31, 141-156, 162-177.

¹³ James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State. How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, (New Haven, 1998), 82-83.

society that was simultaneously modernising both itself and the institution of slavery. The former has certainly been a longstanding critique of slavery which was as popular with nineteenth-century Northern capitalists as it has proved to be amongst some twentieth-century historians; indeed, despite differences of tone and position there is a definite correlation between Eric Foner's description of Northern Republicans as holding the view that "in order to enter the modern world" Southerners "needed not only to abolish slavery but also to adopt the northern way of life," and Genovese's assertion that for African Americans "the plantation system served as a halfway house... between their agricultural past and their imposed industrial future."¹⁴ Such analyses have not been without their critics, however, most obviously Fogel and Engerman who argued that slaveholders were "hard, calculating businessmen," and slavery, as Fogel put it in *Without Consent or Contract*, "a flexible, highly developed form of capitalism," an analysis that surely situates masters (if not slaves) squarely within modernity.¹⁵

As Oakes has argued, however, the problems with such analyses is that they derive their significance from "a very specific and powerful teleology that sees human history moving progressively from barbarism to slavery to feudalism to capitalism."

But what if you start from a different premise? What if you note that it is slavery rather than bourgeois individualism that has proven most ubiquitous in human history, that for reasons closely related to its intrinsic structure, slavery is compatible with a host of

¹⁴ Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War*, (New York, 1995), 40-73, 301-317; Genovese, *Jordan*, 292. Cf. Elizabeth Fox Genovese, Eugene Genovese, 'The Janus Face of Merchant Capital', in *eadem, idem, Fruits of Merchant Capital: Slavery and Bourgeois Property in the Rise and Expansion of Capitalism* (New York, 1983), 3-25, esp. 4-5.

¹⁵ Robert William Fogel, Stanley L. Engerman, *Time On The Cross: The Economics Of American Negro Slavery*, (2 Vols., Boston, 1974), I, 64-65, 67-78, 73; Robert William Fogel, *Without Consent Or Contract: The Rise And Fall Of American Slavery*, (New York, 1989), 60-81, 64; Cf. Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, Colin A. Palmer (int.), (Chapel Hill, 1994; 1944) which famously argued for the intrinsic connection between slavery and industrial capitalism, the former making possible the profits and providing the raw materials for the achievement of the latter.

different social formations, and that there exists a distinctly modern form of slavery which emerges within and as a part of capitalist development?¹⁶

These answers in the form of questions radically revise the problem of the supposedly antithetical nature of slavery and modernity by productively situating slavery within a non-progressive teleology of contingent developments, which we may for convenience label modernity so long as we discard the progressive, qualitative associations of the concept of 'modernisation' and do not assume that it implies a tendency towards socio-economic or political perfection. Moreover, such an approach can usefully situate the issues raised by this thesis, and in particular by this chapter, since the tensions around the specific issues of slaves' literacy and the epistolary cultures of slavery, and the larger issues of the relationship between paternalism and bourgeois capitalism, may each be seen as functioning within a set of discordant discourses that articulated the asynchrony of different responses to the problem of maintaining slavery in a modernising culture.

For some paternalists, therefore, this modern project of "seeing like a state" – which also entailed distancing themselves from the direct exertion of brute force by employing disciplinary strategies to construct and exert hegemonic authority – was augmented by the use of epistolary and archival means of slave governance, practices which are reflected not only in the extensive plantation papers of agriculturalists such as Cocke or Johnston, Pettigrew or the Taits, but also in document collections assembled by slaveholding families such as the Hendersons or DeRossets, families who appear to have been transforming their slaveholding and themselves by hiring out more whilst becoming less reliant on agriculture, their landholdings increasingly coming to represent country estates rather than plantations, their townhouses increasingly the focus of their lives.¹⁷ As with those of the planters,

¹⁶ James Oakes, 'The Sixth Element', *RHR*, 88, (2004), 49-51. Cf. Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, (Cambridge, 1982), vii-ix.

¹⁷ This is not to suggest that slave hiring was a predominantly urban practice either in terms of those that hired out their slaves or those that hired them, for as Martin has shown slave hire was a

these slaveholders' records also show a steady increase of letters over the period, but in this instance from bondspeople who were hired out, and from "quasi-free" slave artisans who hired their own time.¹⁸

As with the evidence for the development of sentimental planter-paternalism, the earliest instance of such a correspondence between a hireling and their owner predates the period 1815-1865, and consists of a single letter dated 8 March 1795 from an enslaved woman named Judith Cocks. Addressed to her master, James Hillhouse, this letter explains that the relationship between Cocks and her hirer, a Mrs Woodbridge, had broken down so fundamentally that, by mutual agreement, Cocks was no longer working for her – "Mrs. Woodbridge... gave up my Indentures and has often said that had she known I was so sickly and expencieve she would not have brought me." But Cocks' real problem was that Woodbridge claimed that Cocks' son Jupiter – who the Woodbridge children were allowed to "thump and beat... as if he was a Dog" – was "to live with her until he is twenty five years of age." Worse still, she was threatening to take Jupiter with her when she moved:

....

I hope you will excuse me of troubl Ling you wich I think you will do when you think that I am here in A strange country without a Friend to advise me[.] Mrs. Woodbridge

ubiquitous feature of southern slavery in all its permutations. Rather it is an observation on the sources which predominantly describe slaves hired out by urban dwelling slaveholders to work in urban situations. Martin, *Divided*, 1-8. Cf. Berlin, *Generations*, 221-225; Genovese, *Jordan*, 391-392. For letters relating to the DeRossets' Wilmington, slave hiring business see WHT to ED, 10 June 1862, 3 October 1862, 23 October 1862, BD to ED, 3 October 1862, Jimmey to ED, 25 March 1863, DD to ED, August 186[3?], DeRosset Family Papers, SHC.UNC-CH. For letters relating to the Hendersons' Salisbury, NC business see AH to ArH and MH, 26 January 1849, and 14 June 1857; AH to ArH, 9 March 1865; Isabella to MH, 29 April, [1857/1859?]; and slave hiring lists for 1849, 1851, 1853, 1857, 1858 (2 lists), 1860 (2 lists), 1862, 1863, John S. Henderson Papers, SHC.UNC-CH. These papers should also be compared to those of Mary Henderson's Grandmother, Mary Steele, in particular AS to MS, 17 November 1835, John Steele Papers, SHC.UNC-CH. Cf. Quintus Barber to Charles P. Howard, 6 September 1840, *BIB*, 88; Sophia No Body [Amis] to Sallie Amis and Elizabeth Amis, 7 June 1858, Blanchard Papers; Jerry Hooper to John DeBernier Hooper, 19 October 1861, John DeBernier Hooper Papers, SHC.UNC-CH.

¹⁸ Loren Schweninger, 'The Underside of Slavery: the Internal Economy, Self-Hire, and Quasi-Freedom in Virginia, 1780-1865', *S&A*, XII.2, (1991), 1-22, explains this concept.

setts out for connecticut and I make no doubt she will apply to buy Jupiter's time which
I beg you will be so good as not to sell her[.]

¹⁹

....

Thus as an item in Hillhouse's archive this letter occupies an ambiguous position, for we cannot tell whether it memorialises the decision to help Cocks or to ignore her, and as such it might have played a sentimental role similar to that of 'Uncle' Paul's letter or else have represented Hillhouse's power to do as he would with his property. In either case, however, this act of archivization is significant in that it is an example of the way in which masters could utilize slaves' letters to extend their gaze and thus their power beyond the boundaries of their slaveholdings and it is in fact one of the first pieces of direct evidence that in this formulation slavery was not dependent upon the "appropriation" of the body of the slave via "costly and violent" relations of power but upon the "elegance of the discipline." Moreover, it also reveals the extent to which slaves understood the power of the archive as a repository of power/knowledge in that Cocks closes with a plea for discretion: "Please [don't] show this letter to Mrs Woodridge."²⁰

Over time, examples of such letters become far more frequent, again suggesting that it was with the gradual shift from patriarchal to paternal slaveholding that took place over the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that saw the development of epistolary strategies of slave management, and aside from letters

¹⁹ Judith Cocks to James Hillhouse, 8 March 1795, *ST*, 7-8. The letter is also particularly interesting in that it clearly reveals the complex "divided mastery" that typified such hiring arrangements, arrangements that posed significant problems for masters even as they created possibilities for slaves. Martin, *Divided*, 44-71, 105-137.

²⁰ On this point it is worth noting that at the end of the Civil War many former masters returning to their plantations found that, whilst unsupervised, their slaves had attacked various symbols of white authority. In one such instance they had not only vandalized the house, but the master's study had been a particular focus for their rage, and was found, in the words of the planter's daughter, "almost waist-deep in torn letters and papers," an attack which might be considered as deliberately targeting the archive as a symbolic and practical repository of power and knowledge. Elizabeth W. Pringle, *Chronicles of 'Chicora Wood'*, (Atlanta, 1976; 1922), 268-269, in William Dusingberre, *Them Dark Days: Slavery in the American Rice Swamps*, (Athens, 1996), 380.

from 'privileged' plantation slaves such as Lucy Skipwith or her father, George, they make up the majority of the letters from slaves archived by their masters. But this development may not simply be, as it first appears, correlative to a developing practice of slave hiring, for it is notable that many of the letters actually reflect slaves' willingness to use their epistolary relationship with their masters to effect negotiations over the terms of their service, to whom they were hired or where they would work.²¹ As such, while this speaks to the ways in which epistolary culture served as a point of articulation between the power of the master to require correspondence and the power of the slave to use it to manipulate and negotiate the relationship, in terms of slaveholders' decisions to keep such correspondence I think that these letters also fit the model of archives as embodiments of sentiment and self-perception just as much as they are implicated in their projects of "seeing like a state."

In this regard it is worth noting that Jonathon Martin, in an echo of Oakes, argues that slave hiring was in fact antithetical to masters' self-constructions as sentimental paternalists since it exposed "the extent to which relations between owners and their slaves were mediated by the market, rather than by organic duties and responsibilities," a position that I would not necessarily dispute in the generality.²² Nonetheless, it certainly appears questionable in the specific instances to which slave letters afford an insight, since these are a set of documents that almost without exception reveal their authors as working within the paternalistic discourse. This may not mean that their masters were equally committed to viewing the relationship in these terms, of course, and might suggest instead that such slaves were endeavouring to remind slaveowners whose hiring practices had led to the weakening of the paternalistic bond of their proper duties and responsibilities, but if

²¹ Martin, *Divided*, 17-43, traces the development of slave hiring and quasi-freedom over space and time.

²² *Ibid.*, 19. Oakes, *Ruling*, 192-196.

this is the case then such masters' archivization of their slaves' letters suggest that it was not an unwelcome reference and that they at least enjoyed viewing themselves in such terms.

For instance, in a letter dated 10 May 1837, Billy Branch, a quasi-free blacksmith who lived independently and hired his own time, tells his master, Thomas W. Harriss, of the disaster that has befallen him:

Franklin County, No[rth] Ca[rolina], May 18th 1837²³

Mr Thomas Harriss,

Dear Master

I have had the misfortune to have my house burnt with every thing that I had upon earth except what cloths I had on [.] I left home in morning and went down to my shop at Mr Peter Fosters mill and in my absence the house caught on fire some time in the evening suposed to be by the fire falling from the pipe of a woman that lived in the house with me when she went to get her breakfast as the body of the house was consumed before the chimney. my misfortune to me is truly great as it is the labour of Forty years as bare of all Earthly comforts as I was when I was born yet I try to bear it with Christian fortitude and speak in the language of Job[:] The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away and blessed be <the> name of the Lord. the people in the neighbourhood has who was acqua<i>nted with <me> has been Charitable to me. you have known me from my youth until the present time my labours has been for the welfare of you and yours ever since I was able to work[.] my situation is truly lamentable one. you profess to be a Christian and be it <far> from me to doubt that you [practice] it and the scripture saith faith hope and charity are the three greatest things in a christian and the greatest of these is Charity and <I> humbly pray that your unbounded wealth will afford and your unbounded generosity will please bestow and I shall ever pray for the prosperity of you and yours so long as life shall last

Your Old and humble servant

Billy Branch, Blacksmith

What is striking about this letter is the way in which Branch seeks to engage Harriss' help by highlighting the sentimental bonds that bind master to slave – “you have known me from my youth until the present time my labours has been for the welfare of you and yours ever since I was able to work” – as well as by playing to what he presumes to be his masters' self-image – “you profess to be a Christian” – and by bare-faced flattery – “your unbounded wealth... your unbounded generosity.”

²³ Billy Branch to Mr Thomas Harriss, 10 May 1837, Thomas Whitmel Harriss Papers, DUKE.

Whether or not this strategy worked we cannot tell, but the fact that Harriss chose to keep the letter implies that it might have done. Moreover, with Martin's doubts about the effects of market forces upon the ideology of the paternalist in mind, I would suggest that this act of archivization suggests that as a conceit, if not a practice, the sentimental self-image of the paternalist remained sufficiently strong as to be a factor on which slaves could play by offering masters the chance to act out the sentimentality they liked to idealize; if such opportunities came in epistolary form, so much the better for the slaveholder who could then memorialize their paternalism in their archives.

The letters hirelings and quasi-free self-hiring slaves wrote to their owners also highlight another significant feature of the overall archive, namely its gender bias. In terms of the total number of correspondents there are only 50 females compared to 71 males, but if one looks specifically at the number of letters from slaves that were hired out these statistics reveal some interesting issues. For instance, among those who hired their own time 8 were male and 4 female, and amongst hirelings 16 were male and only 6 female. As such, this is perhaps a reflection on the way in which gender shaped slaves' differential experiences of their enslavement, since it was certainly the case that male slaves were more likely to be 'privileged' with the types of skills that would make it profitable for masters to let them live the quasi-free life of the self-hired slave.²⁴ This does not, however, explain the differential amongst hirelings, because men, women and indeed women and their children could all expect to be hired out.

With regard to gender, however, there is a second issue which is worth highlighting, namely the fact that although in the entire archive the ratio of male correspondents to female correspondents is only 1.4:1, the gender ratio for letters is 2.2:1 and for messages 2.5:1. This is a variation that is almost entirely due to the

²⁴ White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 74-76.

large number of letters and messages from male slaves in the large series (although Lucy Skipwith's letters are clearly the exception here) which reflect the ways in which masters' preconceptions about appropriate gender roles affected the experience of their slaves. It is worth noting, however, that whilst across the entire archive just 39 of the total of 105 intended recipients were women, amongst these slaves form the largest number (21) whereas among the correspondence from males, bondpeople make up the smallest number of recipients (11). Moreover, in terms of the correspondence between slaves it would appear that women wrote to each other as often as they wrote to men whereas bondsmen appear to have written to each other far less frequently than they did to bondswomen. Of course, given the limits of the data we should again be cautious about drawing any larger conclusions from this apparent anomaly, and I am certainly not suggesting any less sense of community or kinship or need for communication between males than between females, but at the same time I would suggest that this data does correspond with much of what is known about the construction of gender that was both imposed upon and developed within the enslaved African American communities of the Antebellum South. For instance, since female slaves generally enjoyed less freedom of movement than males, it may well be that for the literate (or those who could get letters written for them), epistolary contact served as a surrogate for personal contact in situations where male slaves might have had greater opportunities to have visited.²⁵

But of course it may be that slaveowners simply retained more 'feminine' correspondence because it better conformed to the sentimental image they sought to construct. This highlights a crucial issue pertaining to the paternalist's archive,

²⁵ Rebecca J. Griffin, "'Goin' Back Over There to See That Girl': Competing Social Spaces in the Lives of the Enslaved in Antebellum North Carolina', *S&A*, XXV.1, (2004), 94–96; Stephanie M.H. Camp, "'I Could Not Stay There': Enslaved Women, Truancy and the Geography of Everyday Forms of Resistance in the Antebellum Plantation South", *S&A*, XXIII.3, (2002), 3–6; Emily West, 'Masters and Marriages, Profits and Paternalism: Slave Owners' Perspectives on Cross-Plantation Unions in Antebellum South Carolina,' *S&A*, XXI.1, (2000), 56–72, *passim*.

namely slaveholders' decisions to hold onto letters that were intended for hirelings' families and friends, or more often that were addressed to the master but contained messages for slaves.²⁶ As we shall see in Part Four, that one must almost exclusively depend upon masters' archives for knowledge of how slaves themselves utilised epistolary culture is a frustrating problem, given the references not only within the Narratives but even in some slaves' letters to the existence of such a culture, but from the point of view of analysing how slaves' epistolary culture articulated with the master discourse of paternalism it raises some interesting possibilities.²⁷ Certainly, as Martin argues, these letters and messages were "a crucial element in [slaves'] determined efforts to keep loving ties from snapping under the strain of separation" and yet in their masters' hands they surely served a rather different purpose, namely the confirmation of their sentimental attachment to their slaves as

²⁶ See for instance, AH to ArH and MH, 26 January 1849, Henderson Papers; James Woodfin to Nicholas Woodfin, 25 April 1853, Albert McDowell to Charles McDowell, 13 July 1854, and 13 May 1855, Nicholas Washington Woodfin Papers, SHC.UNC-NC; James Burwell to George W. Burwell, 10 May 1864, George W. Burwell Papers, SHC.UNC-NC; Bob Gorill to Ralph Gorrell, 30 October 1864, and James Critten to Ralph Gorrell, 6 December 1864, Ralph Gorrell Papers, SHC.UNC-CH.

²⁷ For examples of references to letters and the significance of epistolary culture in the Narratives see Green, Eldridge, *Memoirs*, 32; James Williams, *Narrative of James Williams, an American Slave, Who Was for Several Years a Driver on a Cotton Plantation in Alabama*, (New York, 1838), (DocSouth, 1997), 53; Moses Grandy, *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy, Late a Slave in the United States of America*, (London, 1843), (DocSouth, 1996), 42; William Hayden, *Narrative of William Hayden, Containing a Faithful Account of His Travels for a Number of Years, Whilst a Slave, in the South. Written by Himself*, (Cincinnati, 1846), (DocSouth, 2001), 83-84; Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New-York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853*, (Auburn, 1853), (DocSouth, 1997), 25, 73-74, 184, 194, 230-235, 275-281, 289-298, 305, 320, 325, 330; Isaac Williams, *Aunt Sally: or, The Cross the Way of Freedom. A Narrative of the Slave-life and Purchase of the Mother of Rev. Isaac Williams of Detroit, Michigan*, (Cincinnati, 1858), (DocSouth, 2000), 14-15, 17-18, 133-134, 173-178, 180-181; Jacobs, *Incidents*, 193-197, 215-216, 258-260; Thomas H. Jones, *The Experience of Thomas H. Jones, who was a Slave for Forty-Three Years*, (Boston, 1862), (DocSouth, 1995), 37-45; Elizabeth Keckley, *Behind the Scenes, or, Thirty years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House*, (New York, 1868), (DocSouth, 1999), 26-27, 39-40; John Quincy Adams, *Narrative of the Life of John Quincy Adams, When in Slavery, and Now as a Freeman*, (Harrisburg, 1872), (DocSouth, 1999), 29; Henry Clay Bruce, *The New Man: Twenty-Nine Years a Slave. Twenty-Nine Years a Free Man*, (York, 1895), (DocSouth, 1997), 101. For examples of letters that make reference to slaves' epistolary culture see LS to JHC, 22 November 1859, *DMLSF*, 226, and Osbourne Copes to Joseph S. Copes, 9 December 1851, Joseph S. Copes Papers, TU.

well as their intimate and intrusive control of their ability to communicate.²⁸ As such, these archivable materials could be inserted into the masters' collection in a way that must surely have served to strengthen their self-image as sentimental paternalists.²⁹

Overall, therefore, even if one only accepts Oakes' minimalist analysis of antebellum paternalism as a mere rhetorical figure, a ubiquitous part of the language of slaveholding in the nineteenth-century but barely relevant to its increasingly mercantile practice, it nonetheless remains a convincing explanation for the fact that the overlapping epistolary cultures and practices of archivization by which masters made slaves' letters ever more meaningful is so clearly reflected in the temporal bias of the overall archive.³⁰ Indeed, although one would expect to find that a greater number of collections and individual documents have survived from more recent periods, the change over time is striking and is worth re-emphasizing: for the period preceding 1815 (forty five years after Wheatley penned her first letter to the Countess of Huntingdon, and fifty years before Cocke would receive that final missive from Lucy) there are just 14 letters from 7 correspondents, whereas over the rest of the period the quantity of archived correspondence increases dramatically decade on decade, with 15 letters from 11 correspondents archived in the 1820s, 21

²⁸ Martin, *Divided*, 54. It is notable that Martin mistakenly classifies two letters received by the DeRosset family as being from hirelings. These letters both date from the summer of 1862 when the family had apparently left Wilmington, perhaps due to an outbreak of yellow fever, perhaps, as Starobin argues, to escape "cataclysmic military and political events" leaving Bella and Daniel DeRosset (both in the eighties) and William Henry Thurber in charge of their townhouse. Certainly, the DeRossets were engaged in the slave hiring business as a letter written by Jimmey reveals, but in the case of William Henry and Bella their requests for provisions, fresh fruit and money all attest to the fact that they had been left to look after themselves (and perhaps too the slave hiring business) in the absence of their masters. Nonetheless, Martin is correct to point out that each of their letters to their mistress also served as a conduit for messages to their loved ones and as such their archivization fits the model I am proposing. See WHT to ED, 10 June 1862, 3 October 1862, 23 October 1862; BD to ED, 3 October 1862; Jimmey to ED, 25 March 1863; DD to ED, August 186[3?], DeRosset Papers.

²⁹ See Troutman, 'Correspondences', 225-228 and *passim.*, for a discussion of the importance that sentiment played in slaveholder's self-constructions and the ways in which slave letter writers learned to play on it in order to achieve their own ends whilst also satisfying their owners' emotional needs.

³⁰ Oakes, *Ruling*, 192-224.

from 23 in the 1830s, 91 from 19 in the 1840s, and 161 letters from 44 correspondents archived in the 1850s.³¹ Indeed, even in the last turbulent years of slavery, 1860-1865, 65 slave letters from 26 correspondents found their way into various archives.³²

These archival effects are also apparent if we consider issues of space and place. In terms of the former, which is to say with reference to the type of space, be it urban or rural, large or small slaveholding and so forth, the effects of the development of epistolary surveillance is profound in that virtually all the slave correspondents who lived in the countryside (some 42 individuals who between them wrote 190 letters), were amongst the 'privileged' few who managed or oversaw large plantations, most worked by between 25 and 200 slaves. Indeed while there are letters from only 7 slaves who worked on smaller farms and from only 6 who worked plantations with communities numbering 200 or more, 18 of the 33 plantation slave correspondents for whom it is possible to ascertain the size of the slaveholding came from this background. Although clearly given such a sample size it is dangerous to draw hard and fast conclusions as to the significance of this bias, it does suggest some interesting possibilities.

With regard to the paucity of letters from smallholdings, the statistics need little elucidation given that on most small farms slaves and masters lived cheek by jowl and shared many of the everyday tasks meaning that absenteeism was rare and

³¹ It should be kept in mind that the overall statistics are skewed by the slave correspondence in the ACS archives which account for a total of 63 letters from 6 individuals. However, given that most slaves who wrote to the ACS did so with their masters' consent and support, and that some of its most outspoken supporters and patrons were slaveholders who liked to imagine themselves as enlightened paternalists (including Cocke, Pettigrew and Johnston), these letters may also be seen as testifying to the relationship between an ever more subtle and nuanced ideology of paternalism and masters' willingness to allow and even encourage the development of epistolary cultures in slavery. For a fuller discussion of the significance of these archives see Appendix III.

³² The discrepancy between letters and writers for the 1830s is explained by the effect of multiple signatories to individual missives.

the hiring out (though certainly not the hiring) of slaves would have been rare indeed. On very large slaveholdings, by contrast, it is likely that most planters would simply not have been prepared to hand over management to slaves, even if bondsmen worked as drivers and foremen, and is notable that letters to these types of masters tend to be purposeful and unique. For instance in 1854 Rice C. Ballard, a former slave trader who used the profits and opportunities afforded by the interstate trade to boost himself into the planter class, eventually becoming co-owner of multiple plantations and many hundreds of slaves, received a letter from his bondswoman Delia requesting that he purchase Henry, her husband, in order to prevent the two being separated by his sale to another slaveholder, a theme that is common to many slaves' letters.³³ As such, while we may only speculate as to its archival meaning, it certainly stands in contrast to the letters written by hirelings and 'privileged' slaves in that it is a unique product of necessity rather than a commonplace example of a larger practice of communication and slave management.

Between these two groups, however, lay the class of very wealthy but far from super-rich planters who had both the opportunity to experiment with novel means of slave management and to whom paternalism offered significant opportunities for self-construction, perhaps even self-aggrandizement. It may well be, therefore, that for some such slaveholders their willingness to utilize epistolary culture as one of many intrusive disciplinary strategies of slave governance reflected their desire to construct themselves as idealized paternalists as much or even more than it reflected this as actuality.³⁴

³³ Delia to RCB, 20 October 1854, Rice C. Ballard Papers, SHC.UNC-CH. Cf. May Brown to Louisa Alexander, 30 April 1834, Alexander and Hillhouse Family Papers, SHC.UNC-CH; Susan (Sukey) and Ersey to NBT, 24 October 1842; Matthew Watts to Elizabeth Brown, 3 December 1837; James Phillips to Mary Phillips, 20 June 1852; Marie Perkins to Richard Perkins, 8 Oct 1852, *ST*, 13-14, 27, 95-98.

³⁴ Oakes, *Ruling*, 37-68, discusses issues of class status and hierarchy among the slaveholders.

However, this bias towards rural as opposed to urban slavery in terms of both the three large series of letters and in the overall archive, where plantation correspondence accounts for 190 as compared to 149 letters, contrasts with the entire collection in which the majority of correspondents for whom it is possible to determine location worked in urban settings – 60 as compared to 42. As one might expect, these letters reveal a more varied set of circumstances, from skilled and highly independent slaves such as Billy Branch to those hirelings who were regularly hired out to far from well-to-do families, such as a bondswoman named Isabella who wrote of one particular employer: “I have to wait on her as if she were a lady and you know nobody would like that.”³⁵ Again, however, one might speculate that the masters of such slaves, many of whom were not members of the elite but instead owned small numbers of bondspeople whom they hired out year on year rather than give up their status as slaveholders altogether, were wedded to the paternalist ethos because it played to their aspirational self-image.³⁶ As such, they were also perhaps ideal targets for slaves’ ideological manipulation.

Strikingly, however, whether one considers slaves working in urban or rural settings, in large communities or as individual hirelings (who would nonetheless frequently have been part of the extensive neighbourhoods of free and enslaved blacks that existed in many Southern towns and cities) there is a profound regional bias in the archive. Whereas 75 correspondents came from the seaboard states of Virginia, the Carolinas and Georgia, only 17 resided in states on the northern periphery and 19 in states within the interior and South West.³⁷ This contrast becomes even starker when one looks at the number of letters from each region, 220,

³⁵ Isabella to MH, 29 April, [1857/1859?], Henderson Papers.

³⁶ Martin, *Divided*, 74–86, analyses the many reasons masters had for hiring out their slaves, of which this is just one.

³⁷ These statistics exclude letters where no location is given and those written from locations outside the South. The delineation of the South into these three areas is loosely based upon *Generations*, 161–230 *passim*. For a detailed state by state breakdown see Appendix I.

31 and 104 respectively, and even these statistics may overstate the significance of slave letter writing beyond the eastern seaboard if one bears in mind the large numbers of slaves that were transported from these states in the era of the “second middle passage.”³⁸ For instance, despite the fact that the Hopewell slaves worked an Alabama plantation, both Lucy and George Skipwith were born and educated in Virginia, as were the slaves that wrote letters to Nathaniel Beverley Tucker from his plantation near St. Louis, Missouri, whilst the letter Sim Neal wrote from Tennessee, and the one Foxes Penney wrote from Mississippi were both sent to the North Carolina plantation on which they both grew up.³⁹ Subtracting just these letters and letter writers (and it is likely that there are many more who could be counted with them) from the subtotals for the interior and border areas produces dramatic changes, reducing the total number of letter writers from these two areas from 36 to 28 and letters from 135 to just 52; on the other hand, adding them to the subtotal for the seaboard states, which reveals them as the birthplace of 83 enslaved letter writers who between them wrote 303 letters, emphasizes quite how focussed the epistolary cultures of slavery were.

³⁸ In *Generations*, which takes the “second middle passage” as one of its major themes, Berlin estimates that between 1800 and 1860 as many as a million slaves were forcibly relocated from the seaboard states into the southern interior [15]. Given this massive forced migration it is worth noting that many slaves’ letters testify to the destruction this transformation wrought on bondspeople’s communal and family lives. Berlin himself comments on this, contrasting the “flat rendition” of slaves sentiments in Sarah Brownrigg Sparkman’s letter, cited above, with bondspeople’s own more biting letters, taking as an example Pheobia and Cash to Mr Delions [Lyons], 17 March 1857, *BIB*, 57, cited in *ibid.* 188-189. Cf. Phillis to StGT and LSC, [1824?], *ST*, 10; Sim Neal to Mother, Brothers and Sister, 3 September 1827; Foxes Penney to Elizabeth Neal, Neal Family Papers, SHC.UNC-CH; Matildy Girley [sic] to Mrs Jane Gurley, 8 September [1830?]; Matild [sic] Turner [Girley] to Mrs Jain [sic] Gurley, 9 September 1836, Jane Gurley Papers, SHC.UNC-CH; George Pleasant to Agnes Hobbs, 6 September 1833, Keckley, *Behind*, 26-27; VB to RCB, 6 May 1853, Ballard Papers.

³⁹ GS to JHC, 11 May 1847, through 10 November 1850; LS to JHC, 17 August 1854 through 7 December 1865, *DMLSF*, 153-182, 196-263; JH to NBT, 16 November 1834; Susan (Sukey) and Ersey to NBT, 24 October 1842; Usa Peyton to NBT, 23 February 1851, *ST*, 12-14; Sim Neal to Mother, Brothers and Sister, 3 September 1827; Foxes Penney to Elizabeth Neal, Neal Papers.

In the light of this imbalance it is worth considering the way in which changes over time, and between different spaces and places were reshaping slavery for both masters and slaves. Berlin argues that the Antebellum era saw slave states on the north-eastern seaboard increasingly becoming "societies with slaves" whereas, while he is careful to avoid constructing a teleology of development, slavery in the interior became progressively more like it had been in the eighteenth-century Chesapeake; where cotton was king the prevailing structure was the "slave society." This crucial distinction, which Berlin borrows from Moses Finley's analysis of slavery in antiquity, marks the difference between a society where "slavery was just one form of labor among many" and one where "slavery stood at the center of economic production and the master-slave relationship provided the model for all social relationships," a contrast which has profound implications:

As the level of exploitation increased in [the southern interior], labor discipline intensified, and slave mortality and morbidity increased. Manumission became increasingly selective and rare. Something of the opposite happened in the older areas, where labor discipline grew flaccid, the slaves' material circumstances improved, and the possibilities of manumission and even emancipation grew. Everywhere slaves and slaveholders reformulated their lives, as both created new ideologies to deal with the trauma of change.⁴⁰

In the Seaboard South, such "reformulations" may well have played their part in making masters more prepared to experiment with such dangerous ideas as slave education and slave management via epistolary means as paternalistic strategies of pseudo-philanthropic amelioration, though as Berlin is keen to emphasize, we should not automatically assume that such experiments made for a less brutal or exploitative regime.⁴¹ Rather, as Philip Morgan eloquently put it with regard to the construction of the paternalist ethos in general, they were instead an ideological mechanism for "rationalizing the severity that lay at the heart of the slave system" by conceptualizing the master-slave relationship "in voluntary, consensual terms," a

⁴⁰ Berlin, *Generations*, 213-214, 8-11, 17. Moses I. Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology*, (New York, 1980), 79-80, in *ibid.*, 8.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

comment which seems particularly apt for describing the ways in which slaveowners utilised literate slaves and slaves' letters to construct archives that embodied their sentimental self-image.⁴²

Even within regions, however, there could be significant variations. In particular, in the Lowcountry areas of North and South Carolina and Georgia, the vast majority of slaves worked on vast rice plantations which were not only thriving but in fact continuing to develop and expand right up until the Civil War: such regions, where blacks were in the majority and agricultural slavery was the central mechanism of production, surely showed little sign of being transformed into societies with slaves. However, if as Dusiinberre suggests, this regional "rice kingdom" may be seen as the mature model for the development of the "cotton kingdom" of the interior, it is interesting to note that this is also reflected in the archival record: just as there is a paucity of correspondence from slaves that worked on the largest of the cotton plantations, so too is there virtually no correspondence from Lowcountry slaves who worked on the vast plantations owned by men such as Robert Allston or Charles and Louis Manigault.⁴³

But if men such as these were hesitant to place the management of their plantations in the hands of their slaves (which is not to say that they were necessarily hesitant to allow them literacy), on smaller rice and sea-island cotton plantations in this region, some masters again found opportunities to experiment with novel reformulations of slave governance.⁴⁴ For instance, the Reverend Charles Colcock Jones, who owned around one hundred slaves distributed across three large plantations in Liberty County, Georgia, employed a number of enslaved plantation

⁴² Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the eighteenth-century Chesapeake and Lowcountry*, (Chapel Hill, 1998), 296.

⁴³ Dusiinberre, *Dark*, viii-ix.

⁴⁴ Dusiinberre cites a number of examples of literacy amongst both the Allston and Manigault slaves, and though it may not have been encouraged, nor, it seems, was it discouraged by either family. See *ibid.*, 342, 379-380, 425, 429.

managers to oversee the day to day running of his estates, men to whom he delegated significant authority and with whom he maintained a correspondence during his frequent absences. This overall practice was predicated upon his religiously inspired, and often controversial ideas about slave management, but these were also ideas that did not necessarily find favour with the owners of larger plantations nor penetrate into the interior, even if they did influence a small number of other planters in the seaboard states.⁴⁵

Moreover, it is also worth bearing in mind the way in which Jones and men like him such as Cocke, Pettigrew and Johnston, all of whom shared a level of discomfiture with slavery and slaveowning and thus sought to ameliorate it through channelling their power and the surveillance of their plantations through 'privileged' slaves, may be seen to have been members of the moderate antislavery clique that Degler identifies as "conspicuously concentrated" amongst planters in seaboard states. These men, argues Degler, were caught between their conservatism, racism, and economic self-interest on the one hand and their sincere belief that slavery was both morally wrong and socially and economically damaging to the South on the other and thus found themselves drawn towards schemes for gradual emancipation and colonization.⁴⁶ As such many were in fact experimenting, like Cocke, with ways in which to prepare their slaves for freedom whilst at the same time attempting to avoid the worst excesses of the plantation system, hence their preference for black

⁴⁵ Many other planters, it should be noted, regarded Jones, like Cocke, as either a radical or a crank, and his idealistic attempts to encourage other slaveowners to give slaves religious education were frequently derided as pointless or even subversive, a factor which speaks to Oakes' assertion that such men were not only out of step with their mercantilist contemporaries, but also often figures of ridicule and suspicion. Oakes, *Ruling*, 198-202. For a discussion of Jones' ideas on slave management and his successes and failures in spreading them to other slaveholders see Clarke, *Dwelling*, 89, 126-139, 167-172, 216-224, 273-274. Three letters from Jones' slave managers survive, as well as one letter he wrote to them. Catoe [sic] to CCJ, 3 March 1851 and 3 September 1852; Andrew to CCJ, 10 September 1852; CCJ to Cato, 28 January 1851, *BIB*, 43-55.

⁴⁶ Carl N. Degler, *The Other South: Southern Dissenters in the Nineteenth Century*, (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1974), pp. 16, 26, 76, 90-96.

over white overseers and their more or less successful attempts to manage their managers by post. Moreover, finding themselves caught between personal interest and personal beliefs we should not be surprised to find them constructing archives that testified to their attempts to live by the latter and not the former.

Overall, therefore, the foregoing analysis reveals much about the types of slaveholders whose collections of slaves' letters make up the majority of the imaginary archive. Most lived in areas where slave societies were transforming into societies with slaves, and for some slaveholding itself was probably becoming a marginal and peripheral activity, still important in terms of their status and self-image, but perhaps less so in terms of their livelihoods. Whilst many were very rich and well established members of the planter elite, few were *grande*s, and most were probably middling slaveholders, some of whom at least were attempting to find ways to adapt the institution to new circumstances, whilst yet others were uncomfortable with a practice which they also felt was in an inevitable decline. The majority, however, probably still saw themselves as paternalists in some way or other and so sought to establish sentimental as well as authoritarian relationships with their slaves, relationships that could be actualized in correspondence and memorialised in archives. Perhaps most importantly, these were men and women whose changing conceptions of mastery and of slavery were contingent upon the time and place in which they lived, an era where slaveholding, at least within societies with slaves, was increasingly imagined in sentimental, domestic terms, a point which again attests to the correlation between archival record and historical development. It is thus these masters' papers that contain the vast majority of all surviving slave letters, and it is for this reason that I have begun this thesis by considering what these collections may have signified, since this is a question we must keep in mind when dealing with what is present and also what is absent from the overall archive of slaves' letters.

In closing this section, then, I would like to draw attention to one further statistic: between 1760 and 1865 a total of 105 Narratives were written by or for ex-slaves, while over a similar period 124 slaves wrote or had written for them upwards

of 350 letters. In terms of the either quantity or quality of writing, or indeed breadth of description, I am not urging that these statistics be compared as like-with-like, but they do suggest that all-important questions relating to issues such as sample size, range of experience, or temporal and regional diversity, are no more vexed for the letters than they are for the Slave Narratives.⁴⁷ Moreover, just as Narratives have become increasingly easy to access so too have many slaves' letters – Blassingame's *Slave Testimony* contains 111 letters written by 55 different correspondents and is virtually required reading for any undergraduate student of slave history, let alone graduate students and professors. And yet while the Narratives, as well as other forms of evidence from African Americans such as interviews, folklore collections, musical recordings and so forth have all enjoyed a renaissance of interest in the historiography of the past thirty or forty years, the same cannot be said of slaves' letters. The next section therefore turns from the enumeration and analysis of the archive to a discussion of its relative obscurity, situating it against a study of the mainstream historiography which highlights the fact that while slave testimony and attention to slave experience and personality have long been of central importance, methodological and ideological blinkers, along with the sheer inertia of historiographical tradition, have together served to obscure the archive of slaves' letters and thus the significance, even the existence, of slavery's epistolary cultures.

⁴⁷ Gates, Davis, *Narrative*, 319-327.

Part Two

Slaves' Testimony and Slaves' Selves in Historiography, History, and Theory

Introduction

Can the slave speak?

I think it is important to acknowledge our complicity in the muting [of the subaltern], in order precisely to be more effective in the long run.... Yet the moot decipherment by another in an academic institution (willy-nilly a knowledge-production factory) many years later must not be too quickly identified with the 'speaking' of the subaltern. It is not a mere tautology to say that the colonial or postcolonial subaltern is defined as the being on the other side of difference, or an epistemic fracture, even from other groupings among the colonized. What is at stake when we insist that the subaltern speaks?

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, (1999)¹

Spivak's question "Can the subaltern speak?" continues to echo in debates amongst postcolonial historians in ways that are also highly relevant to the historiography of American slavery. Essentially her critique drew attention to the ways in which academics might be seen as co-opting the agency of the subjects for whom they attempted to speak in ways which serve to reconstitute the very imperial and historiographical orientalism that they sought to counter. This was because they ran the risk of presenting those that did 'speak' as speakers for the silent majority, whilst tending to minimize the effects of the professional academic intercessor that in fact spoke for them; sources do not, after all, have their own voices, only those that historians choose to give to them. In beginning this section with the question "can the slave speak?" I am therefore hoping to draw attention to the ways in which historians of American slavery face a similar conceptual impasse when we attempt to foreground slaves 'voices.' Indeed, as I argue over the following three chapters, slaves' testimony has had a similar historiographical career as the testimony of colonial subordinates, and has been subject to similar prejudicial treatment, from being derided and ignored as unrepresentative and of dubious reliability, to being

¹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, (Cambridge, 1999), 309. This quotation is drawn from Spivak's recent discussion of the ways in which her seminal 1983 paper, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', (published in Cary Nelson, Lawrence Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, (Chicago, 1987), 271-315), has been read and misread in the intervening years.

lauded as among the most reliable representations of the voices of African Americans in slavery, to being treated as of some, though questionable value due to its provenance and modes of production.

However, through all of this the slaves' letters have had rather less exposure even as the trend to try to make bondspeople's voices heard in histories of slavery would seem to have made an obvious place for them. The following section therefore sets out to try to understand this absence and so begins by offering an assessment of the historiographical developments that have seen other forms of black testimony relocated from beyond the margins to the centre. The major themes and developments in the overall historiography do not, of course, need to be reiterated; suffice it to say that over the past fifty or more years the increasing tendency to reject 'race' as an explanatory category, to valorise 'slave testimony' (which should more properly be designated ex-slave testimony) in the form of the Narratives and interviews, and to place the psychological, cultural and social experiences of bondspeople at the heart of the analysis, have together produced histories of American Slavery that would be virtually unrecognizable to historians of the Phillips and Dunning schools whose partisan and racist defences of the 'Old South' overshadowed the historiography for much of the past century. Rather than a broad historiographical survey, therefore, the purpose of this piece is to engage in a rather more focussed and critical analysis of the emergence of particular methodological trends and the influence of certain ideological positions on the making of slave history.

I also propose that these differing historiographical moves be understood as responses to a problem that remains of central importance in the study of United States slavery, namely the fact that unlike in other parts of the Atlantic world, it appears to have been a relatively stable institution with a history that was not marked by significant slave rebellions but rather by what has often been construed to be a significant level of passivity and perhaps even acceptance by its victims. However, in an increasingly anti-racist milieu this could no longer be explained if in terms of

African American inferiority. I therefore argue that while the need to resolve this paradox of passivity in ideologically satisfying and acceptable ways has provided much of the impetus for the reinterpretation of the history of American slavery, in its resolution a new orthodoxy has emerged which can itself be both limited and limiting. In particular, while the new studies of African Americans' lived experience in slavery are highly significant for the ways in which they explore many different aspects of individual and communal resistance and foreground ex-slave testimony, at times the emphasis on the independence of slaves from their masters serves to underplay the extent to which their interests articulated, a concept that is of crucial importance in understanding the significance of the epistolary cultures of slavery.²

But while marking the importance of the articulation of the slaves' and the masters' worlds goes some way to explaining this significance and thus creates a historiographical space in which to position and analyse the letters, this only serves to further emphasize the fact that they have yet to be the subjects of sustained historical analysis, and given the profound repositioning of ex-slave testimony that has accompanied these historiographical developments and the interest in finding ways to 'hear' authentic slave 'voices', this an issue which itself seems paradoxical. If, however, we recognize that the canonisation of other forms of black testimony was not merely an ideologically driven response to the paradox of passivity but also intimately connected to debates over slaves' psychology (variously discussed as "psyche," "self," "personality" and so forth) then it becomes apparent that there have also been significant methodological reasons why the direct testimony of slaves as contained in the letters (as opposed to that of ex-slaves as contained in the Narratives and interviews, which are effectively reports on but not from slavery) has been rather overlooked. Furthermore, I suggest that though the vogue for psychohistory may have passed, it shaped an approach to the sources at a critical juncture in the

² Morris, 'Articulation', *passim*.

historiography of slavery. Discussion of these trends thus forms another important aspect of the following chapter whilst the subsequent one critically examines one aspect of this psychohistoriography: the analysis of the slave stutterers. The section then concludes with a chapter that offers an alternative conceptualization of personality and of the appropriate methodology for studying it which are less dependent upon psychoanalytical approaches than upon anthropological ones thus affording more space for the slaves' letters by moving away from psychohistorical analysis of slave psyches and toward hermeneutic approaches to slave texts.

Whether such moves will allow the slave to "speak," however, is a question which haunts not only this section but the next, for as this problem becomes textualised so we must then ask questions of how historians' relate to texts and how texts relate to their authors; suffice it for the moment to emphasize that the intention is to make the reader aware of historiographical complicity in the muting of slaves' voices, in order to be historically more effective in the long run.

Chapter Three

'Race', Racism and the Historiography of Slavery:

How ex-slave testimony solved the paradox of passivity

For a long time the testimony of slaves was ruled out on the ground that it was biased or unreliable – as if the same objection did not exist to the testimony of slaveowners.... It is time we penetrated these institutional abstractions, stereotyped roles and statistical averages to capture the human realities underlying them, the infinite variety, complexity and ambiguity of human beings.

C. Vann Woodward (1973)¹

Though it may have taken decades for the profession to respond, when DuBois asserted that the "history of slavery [should] deal largely with slaves and their point of view" he not only set an agenda for historians of slavery but also set the standard by which the histories they made should be judged, for he effectively placed two crucial issues centre stage: slave psychology and slave testimony.² In 1928, the centrality of these issues was made yet clearer by that other founding father of black history, Carter G. Woodson, who prefaced *Mind of the Negro*, a collection of letters written by African Americans between 1800 and 1860, with the comment that "[l]etters are regarded by historians as excellent historical evidence... [and] from the point of view of the psychology of the Negro, which must be taken into consideration as an important factor in the study of history, these letters are of still larger value."³ Most widely quoted, however, is Richard Hofstadter's reiteration of these themes in a 1944 article that set out a manifesto for a new history of the slave south:

¹ C. Vann Woodward, Annual Rayford W. Logan Lecture, Howard University, Washington, (1973), in Ella Forbes, 'African Resistance to Enslavement: The Nature and the Evidentiary Record', *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 1. (Sep., 1992), 40.

² W. E. B. DuBois, Review of *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime*, *American Political Science Review*, XII, (1918), 723.

³ *MON*, v.

Let the study of the Old South be undertaken by other scholars [than Ulrich B. Phillips and his acolytes] who have absorbed the viewpoint of modern cultural anthropology, who have a feeling for social psychology (a matter of particular importance in the study of a regime in which status was so vital)... who will not rule out the testimony of more critical observers and who will realize that any history of slavery must be written in large part from the standpoint of the slave.⁴

Sentiments such as these provided a significant impetus for the profound revisions of the history of American slavery that have marked the past four or five decades of scholarship, a reassessment that has involved a thorough re-evaluation and revaluation of the evidence, and which has in turn stimulated an appetite for analyses of the sociology of slavery and the ways in which slaves survived or suffered the psychological effects of their enslavement; indeed as Stamppp has implied, interest in the personality of African American slaves has become a central theme of the new historiography.⁵ Moreover, this interest has manifested itself in a desire to find representative sources that resonate with the authentic voices of slaves; as Blassingame put it, "If we want to know the hearts and secret thoughts of slaves, we must study the testimony of blacks...."⁶

Such changes and developments did not, of course, happen in a vacuum and we must keep in mind how much changing racial dynamics in the United States, and indeed changes in the way that the very concept of 'race' has been understood, have been transformed over the last hundred years. Whereas in the early twentieth century historians such as Ulrich B. Phillips could confidently hold forth upon the racial

⁴ Richard Hofstadter, 'U. B. Phillips and The Plantation Legend', *JNH*, XXIX.2, (1944), 124. It is worth noting that Hofstadter cites both Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts*, (New York, 1943), [122 n67], and Raymond A. Bauer, Alice H. Bauer, 'Day to Day Resistance to Slavery', *JNH*, XXVII.4 (1942), 388-419, [123 n68], three historians who were certainly ready to consider "cultural anthropology" and "social psychology," willing to concern themselves with the "standpoint of the slave," and ably utilized "the testimony of more critical observers," which suggests that in highlighting the need for such developments Hofstadter was as much commenting on a shifting academic milieu as he was seeking to encourage it to change.

⁵ Kenneth M. Stamppp, 'Rebels and Sambos: The Search for the Negro's Personality in Slavery', *JSH*, XXXVII.3, (1971).

⁶ *ST*, lxiii. Although this aphoristic statement also graces the cover of *ST* it is notable that Blassingame opens his analysis of the slaves' letters with it.

characteristics of the “Negro,” in the 1980s and 1990s there emerged a range of scholarship which steadfastly rejected the concept of ‘race’ as anything more than the projection of racism onto the objects of its distaste, a sea-change which could not help but have profound implications for the study of slave history.⁷ As Barbara Jeanne Fields puts it, addressing this “great evasion of American historical literature, [and] of American history itself: the substitution of ‘race’ for ‘racism,’” has been a project of fundamental importance, and while it is not necessary to review the history of this wider ideological reassessment itself, nor its political, cultural and social manifestations, it is important to acknowledge that all have fuelled the historiographical developments at issue here.⁸

For example many years before Fields was writing aspects of this paradigm shift were quite apparent in the work of Raymond and Alice Bauer who not only seem to have shared her view that the idea of ‘race’ was in fact no more than a manifestation of American racism but also made clear the profound effects discarding racist presumptions must have upon readings of slave behaviour and, indeed, black testimony. They thus offer the following critique of the ideological debates over slavery in the antebellum era which extends to historical debates since:

As one reads the controversial [pro- and antislavery] literature on the slavery question, it soon becomes apparent that both sides presented the Negro as a docile creature; one side because it wished to prove that he was contented, the other because it wished to prove he was grossly mistreated. Both conceptions have persisted to the present time. Writers who romanticize the ‘Old South’ idealize the condition of the slaves, making them happy, willing servitors, while those who are concerned with furthering the interests of the Negroes are careful to avoid mention of any aggressive tendencies which might be used as a pretext for further suppressing the Negroes.

⁷ Ulrich B. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime*, (New York, 1952; 1918), 291-292; *Life and Labor in the Old South*, (Boston, 1929), 195; Anthony Appiah, ‘The Uncompleted Argument: DuBois and the Illusion of Race’, in Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Race, Writing and Difference*, (Chicago, 1986), 22-37; Barbara Jeanne Fields, ‘Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America’, *NLR*, I.181, (1990), 95-118.

⁸ Barbara J. Fields, ‘Of Rogues and Geldings’, *AHR*, 108.5, (2003), par 2., <<http://www.history.cooperative.org/journals/ahr/108.5/fields.html>>, viewed 11 June, 2006.

⁹ Bauer, Bauer, ‘Resistance’, 389.

Escaping from this paradigm (and thus solving the paradox of passivity) did not require the outright rejection of the apparent signs of contentedness that pro- and antislavery demagogues claim to have witnessed, however. Instead, it required analysing such interpretations without projecting racist stereotypes onto the protagonists. Thus by adopting a “conceptual framework” which assumed that “slaves were forced into outward forms of compliance to slavery” rather than being by racial disposition compliant, and by understanding that with the exception of “the few who were able to escape to the North [slaves recognized that they] had to accept the institution of slavery and make their adjustments to that institution” the Bauers found a way to reinterpret evidence of passivity as evidence of activism, albeit mundanely resistant or defiant rather than spectacularly rebellious and revolutionary.¹⁰

Furthermore, the Bauers’ work is notable for another reason, namely their use of sources, for whereas racist stereotypes may have encouraged other historians to assume that black writers were either so dependent upon white abolitionist intercessors as to be completely unreliable, or else to be so exceptional in their literacy and intellect as to be unrepresentative of their fellows, discarding such prejudice revealed a set of sources that qualified the testimony of white observers in profound ways. For example, in highlighting that though slaveholders described their slaves as passive and content they nonetheless seemed to be in an almost constant state of trepidation regarding the possibility of slave revolts they cite neither a slaveholder’s writings, nor white traveller’s observation, nor court documents but instead ex-slave Lewis Clarke’s Narrative:

In answer to the question “Are the masters afraid of insurrection?” (a slave) says, “They live in constant fear upon this subject. The least unusual noise at night alarms them greatly. They cry out, ‘What is that?’ ‘Are all the boys in?’”¹¹

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 390.

¹¹ Lewis Clarke, *Narratives of the Sufferings of Milton and Lewis Clarke*, (Boston, 1846), 123, in *ibid.*, 388.

The Bauers' analysis therefore turned the white sources on their heads by giving credence to slave testimony, posing a radical challenge to the traditional historiography. Furthermore, as well as utilizing slave testimony as a means to study slavery from the point of view of the slave, their work also contained an intimation of the sorts of novel approaches to the study of slavery which would emerge in the latter part of the twentieth century, because what was implicit was the significance of slave culture; if nothing else, their conceptual framework implied its existence, for the concept of a consistently articulated and socially endorsed practice of resistance required some mechanism which validated certain tactics and ensured the transmission of these both to other slaves and to their descendents. Such a mechanism could only be socio-cultural or, as Sterling Stuckey described it, "a life style and set of values – an ethos – which prevented them from being imprisoned altogether by the definitions which the larger society sought to impose."¹² Since they were students of Melville Herskovits such an implicit recognition of the significance of culture should perhaps come as no great surprise, but I would suggest that as such 'Day to Day Resistance to Slavery' must be seen as an important precursor to works such as Philip D. Morgan's *Slave Counterpoint*, a masterful study of slave culture in colonial America which includes the comment that not only testifies to the ubiquity the idea of slaves' day to day resistance has gained, but also to the fact that their resistance cannot be comprehended without reference to culture.¹³

¹² Sterling Stuckey, 'Through the Prism of Folklore: The Black Ethos In Slavery', in Allen Weinstein, Frank Otto Gatell (eds.) *American Negro Slavery: A Modern Reader*, (Oxford, 1973), 135.

¹³ Herskovits' groundbreaking study, *The Myth of The Negro Past*, (New York, 1941) may in many ways be seen to be the forerunner to the development of black diasporic and thus black Atlantic studies, and while his attempts to assert direct correlations between West-African customs and African American (slave) culture may have been called into question or at least highly qualified by more recent studies, he nonetheless remains a pioneer in the field of African (American) Studies, as is apparent from the fact that *Myth* is still cited in much of the contemporary literature on the subject, such as Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities In The Colonial and Antebellum South*, (Chapel Hill, 1998), 10, 24-25; Sandra E. Greene, 'Cultural Zones in the Era of the Slave Trade: Exploring the Yoruba Connection with the Anlo-Ewe', in Paul E. Lovejoy (ed.) *Identity in the Shadow of Slavery*, (London, 2000), 86-88; Alan Rice, *Radical Narratives of the Black Atlantic*, (London, 2003), 83.

Readers may be surprised that there is no chapter on resistance. In a sense this whole book is a study of resistance... [for slaves'] major triumph was the creation of a coherent culture – the subject of this book and the most significant act of resistance in its own right.¹⁴

The Bauers, then, along with scholars such as Herbert Aptheker, Harvey Wish and Charles Nichols, may be seen to have stood in the vanguard of a revisionist movement that effectively dismissed the paradox of passivity as fundamentally (even wilfully) erroneous, a product of the combined effects of racism, uncritical readings of slaveholder and other white testimony, and the rejection and/or misinterpretation of alternative sources of evidence.¹⁵ In its place, they constructed a view of slaves as “troublesome property,” as Kenneth Stampp put it in his seminal 1956 monograph, *The Peculiar Institution*.¹⁶ As Fogel has argued, it was with the publication of this text, more than ten years after the publications of ‘Day to Day Resistance,’ *American Negro Slave Revolts*, and ‘U. B. Phillips and the Plantation Legend’, that the “image of day to day resistance” would be “elaborated and extended” in a way that “finally

¹⁴ Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the eighteenth-century Chesapeake and Lowcountry*, (Chapel Hill, 1998), xxii.

¹⁵ Aptheker, *Revolts*; Harvey Wish, ‘The Slave Insurrection Panic of 1856’, *JSH*, V.32, (1939), 206-222; ‘American Slave Insurrections before 1861’, *JNH*, XXII.23, (1937), 435-450; Charles H. Nichols, Jr., ‘Slave Narratives and the Plantation Legend’, *Phylon*, X.3, (1949), 201-210. Clearly the argument of *Revolts* (which was anticipated in a number of earlier articles by Aptheker, namely ‘American Negro Slave Revolts’ Part I, *Science and Society*, 1, (1937), 512-538; ‘American Negro Slave Revolts’ Part II, *Science and Society*, 2, (1938), 386-392; and ‘Maroons Within the Present Limits of the United States’, *JNH*, XXIV.2, (1939), 167-184), went rather further than the “troublesome property” thesis, but as many critics have suggested Aptheker’s insistence on “rebelliousness” as opposed to “resistance” is perhaps overstated. Indeed, even were one to accept that conspiracies occurred with the frequency that he suggested, the unconsummated act of conspiring may perhaps be better described as an act of resistance than rebellion, a possible ‘we could’ rather than a definite ‘we will’, and to assume that every actual plot (as opposed to imagined conspiracy), had it not been exposed and thwarted, would have blossomed into fully fledged revolt is too large an assumption to accept. For critiques of *Revolts* see, Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812*, (Chapel Hill, 1968) 121-122; Stampp, ‘Rebels’, 370; Genovese, *Jordan*, 588-591.

¹⁶ Stampp, *Institution*, 96. This well known phrase forms the title of the chapter on slave resistance in Stampp’s work and has thus perhaps become rather hackneyed, but it is particularly apposite in the context of a thesis which concerns itself with slave correspondence since it is drawn from a letter between two masters whose slaves’ writings form significant sub-series in the entire archive of bondpeople’s correspondence: William S. Pettigrew and James C. Johnston. WSP to JCJ, 6 January 1847, Pettigrew Papers.

succeeded in pushing the question of slave culture into the mainstream of historiographic debate.”¹⁷ For Stamp’s work not only portrayed the violence and cruelty inherent in slavery but also drew attention to its significance as the cradle of African American culture and the centrality of day to day resistance to slaves’ relationships with their masters. It therefore proposed that the vast majority of enslaved African Americans must have engaged in an almost continuous round of resistance, punctuated from time to time with acts of rebellion, suggesting that slaves “found countless ways to exasperate their masters,” from malingering to feigning ignorance, damaging property to simulating illness and disability, theft and arson to poisoning, self-mutilation and infanticide to suicide and murder.¹⁸

Significantly, however, Stamp did not regard all such examples of slaves’ day to day resistance as evidence of slaves’ “conscious protest against bondage”; they may, in fact, have been no more than “unconscious reflections of the character that slavery had given” them, and in this statement one can see the way in which he and his contemporaries viewed the slave as a social product of the institution of slavery, a position which as we shall see in the next chapter, was very much a product of contemporary theories about personality, selfhood and identity and their relationship to the social and cultural environment, the esteem of others and the punishment of deviancy.¹⁹ If, however, Stamp’s argument contained elements of, or at least a prototype for, what would become in Elkins’ work the ‘Sambo’ thesis – and at the very least we must allow that both Elkins and Stamp operated within the same critical paradigm and made the same assumptions about personality formation as a social act – then it is nonetheless important to acknowledge that it also contained

¹⁷ Robert William Fogel, *Without Consent Or Contract: The Rise And Fall Of American Slavery*, (New York, 1989), 158.

¹⁸ Stamp, *Institution*, 91-141 *passim*., quote 91.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 98.

the seeds of Sambo's destruction.²⁰ This is because Stamppp explicitly identified cultural and communal elements in these resistant activities, elements that provided an alternate set of values, source of self esteem and categories of deviance and conformity. While the Bauers' argument had implied the significance of culture, and Aptheker's the importance of community, in *The Peculiar Institution* the communal and cultural significance of resistance was writ large:

In slave society... success, respectability and morality were measured by other standards, and prestige won in other ways... Most [slaves] admired and respected the bold rebel who challenged slave discipline. The strong-willed field hand whom the overseer hesitated to punish, the habitual runaway who mastered the technique of escape and shrugged at the consequences, each won personal triumphs for himself and vicarious triumphs for others. The generality of slaves believed that he who knew how to trick or deceive the master had an enviable talent, and they regarded the committing of petit larceny as both thrilling and praiseworthy.²¹

However, as Stamppp's references to personality attest, while the "troublesome property" thesis and the analyses of cultural resistance/resistant cultures that were its corollaries were one important stream that fed into the historiographical revisionism and evidentiary re[e]valuation of the 1960s and 1970s, the other was what would become the 'Sambo' thesis, an analysis that proved at least as significant in terms of encouraging historians to reconsider the importance of black testimony and black perspectives on slavery, if only because they were so

²⁰ Stanley Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem In American Institutional And Intellectual Life*, (Chicago, 1976; 1959).

²¹ *Ibid.*, 334-335. The significance of the "troublesome property" thesis in stimulating new research on slave resistance cannot be understated, as the considerable body of work that concerns itself directly with issues of resistance, be it day to day or exceptional and violent, attests. See, for instance, Gerald W. Mullin, *Flight And Rebellion: Slave Resistance In Eighteenth-Century Virginia*, (Oxford, 1972); Philip D. Morgan, 'Colonial South Carolina Runaways: Their Significance for Slave Culture', *S&A*, VI.3, (1985), 57-78; Edward A. Pearson, "'A Countryside Full of Flames': A Reconsideration of the Stono Rebellion and Slave Rebelliousness in the Eighteenth-Century South Carolina Low Country", *S&A*, XVII.2 (1996), 22-50; Peter Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren: David Walker And The Problem Of Antebellum Slave Resistance*, (University Park, 1997); James Sidbury, *Ploughshares Into Swords: Race, Rebellion, And Identity In Gabriel's Virginia, 1730-1810*, (Cambridge, 1997); John Hope Franklin, Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation*, (New York, 1999); Mark M. Smith, 'Remembering Mary, Shaping Revolt: Reconsidering the Stono Rebellion', *JSH*, LXVII.3, (2001), 513-34.

eager to challenge it.²² In *Slavery: A Problem In American Institutional And Intellectual Life* (a title which itself highlights the ways in which popular ideology and historical scholarship interact), Elkins asserted that slaves were infantilized and emasculated by their enslavement, a theory that he sought to demonstrate by suggesting that conditions for plantation slaves in the United States were so psychologically damaging and dehumanizing as to be analogous to the impact of Nazi concentration camps on their inmates. He therefore suggested that the slaves, like the inmates of Dachau and Buchenwald described by Bruno Bettelheim,²³ became incapable of resistance, let alone rebelliousness, and instead internalized the 'Sambo' mentality their masters constructed for them, an identity he described as follows:

Sambo, the typical plantation slave, was docile but irresponsible, loyal but lazy, humble but chronically given to lying and stealing; his behavior was full of infantile silliness and his talk inflated with childish exaggeration. His relationship with his master was one of utter dependence and childlike attachment: it was indeed this childlike quality that was the very key to his being.

Moreover, he argued that while the existence of 'Sambo' traits could not be explained as a consequence of racial inferiority, nor could they simply be explained away as either a mask (although he barely credits this possibility) or a racial

²² I use the word 're[e]valuate' to signify the overall reconsideration and reassessment of evidence, for there is a certain recursiveness and reflexivity about the relationship between the 'revaluation' of the sources and the 're-evaluation' of their meaning which must be acknowledged. Indeed, while 'revaluing' and 're-evaluating' may seem similar, it is important to highlight that they are in fact distinct yet interrelated processes, an idea that is explored throughout the following analysis. In brief, the significant issue I am seeking to highlight by using this term is that the 're-evaluation' of the content of slave sources was predicated on a novel assumption, namely that they were extremely *valuable* simply because they were slave sources. This was a profound 'revaluation', since until this point slave sources had frequently been dismissed as virtually *valueless*, either by racists whose prejudice precluded them from finding anything of *value* in black testimony, or by those who believed these sources to be so compromised by white editors and intercessors as to be wholly unrepresentative of the genuine experiences, thoughts and feelings of slaves. Having asserted this 'revaluation' of their worth, their champions then had to 're-evaluate' what these slave sources could actually tell them.

²³ Elkins' reference point for the behaviour of these inmates was an article by Bruno Bettelheim, a Holocaust Survivor who had been interned in Dachau and Buchenwald from 1938 to 1939, entitled 'Individual and Mass Behavior in Extreme Situations', *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, XXXVIII, (1943), 417-452, in Elkins, *Slavery*, 106, 109-112.

stereotype imposed/imagined by racist observers; “[t]o impeach Sambo’s legitimacy in this way is the next thing to talking him out of existence.” No, for Elkins the evidence was simply too convincing for such intellectualized and politically correct explanations:

The picture has too many circumstantial details, its hues have been stroked by far too many different brushes, for it to be denounced as counterfeit. Too much folk-knowledge, too much of the Negro’s own lore, have gone into making it to entitle one in good conscience to condemn it as ‘conspiracy’.²⁴

Such an assessment was surely bound to provoke controversy, especially in an era when the struggle for African American civil rights (which was of course in part a struggle fought on University campuses and involving academics as well as students) was impelling historians to call into question not only the old historiography of slavery, but also the sources of evidence on which they had relied. In the present context, however, it is of central importance to remember that Elkins’ thesis was criticized not solely for his conclusions but also because of his sources, for nowhere did he, as had the Bauers, compare the testimony of masters and other white observers to the testimony of blacks, but instead seemed prepared to almost uncritically accept the slaveholders’ and other white witnesses’ descriptions of slaves, a failure that is only emphasized by the fact that he introduced his book with the comment that “the sources have now been mined and remined; it is hard to imagine major veins of primary material lying still untapped,” hence his preference for an argument by analogy.²⁵ But in fact Elkins went further than this, as a brief review of his analysis of the evidence reveals, an analysis which is worth examining given that he was in no way unrepresentative in his assessment of what was lacking, even if his opinion of what was there might be considered somewhat unimaginative.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 82-84.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 2. It is worth noting that Frederickson and Lasch concurred with Elkins in his assessment of the paucity of slave testimony and thus the need for argument by analogy, offering the following justification for their own use of the prison/asylum analogy: “Only the testimony of the slaves could tell us, once and for all, whether slaves resisted slavery. In the absence of their testimony, it is tempting to resort to analogies.” Frederickson, Lasch, ‘Resistance’, 228-229.

For instance, in discussing “The Old Debate” (by which he means to indicate the debate between the pro- and antislavery camps, a debate which has, he rightly argued, profoundly coloured and shaped debates in the historiography), Elkins proposed that the majority of the sources on both sides were problematic since they were “polemical.” He then suggested that despite this both the sympathetic and unsympathetic travellers’ observations are useful, and that due to the “character” of such witnesses their testimony should be read from the point of view that “none of these observers was lying about the facts as he saw them [though] [d]ifferent facts impressed different people, of course.” This is a deceptively simple statement, for it is surely in the “as he saw them” that one can locate the potential for (racist) prejudice to produce extensive distortions and for the subjectivity of the observer to determine their understandings of the observed. But while historians such as the Bauers had thus been unsurprised to find that racist observers misconstrued playing dumb for being so, Elkins’ evidential naiveté (and it must be said that his entire approach to his subject, and to the critical storm his resurrection of ‘Sambo’ produced was at best naïve, at worst falsely so) was not limited to such simplifications of the complex process of assessing the effects that the prejudiced gaze must have on the object of its attention, and in a footnote he also adds the following comment: “To this material [travellers’ observations, laws and legal testimony, pro- and antislavery polemics] should be added *whatever is dependable* from the reminiscences and narratives of the slaves themselves.” Again then, he reduced the most complex of hermeneutic tasks to near absurdity by a glib but unexplored reference to the limitations of the sources, which is only qualified by stereotypical observations that many narratives “are heavily edited by abolitionists, though not entirely undependable,” and that while Douglass’ *My Bondage and My Freedom* (though not, apparently, his other autobiographical texts) “is obviously not the work of an ordinary slave, ... some of the author’s insights are very valuable.”²⁶

²⁶ *Slavery*, 2-4, 3 n3 [emphasis added]. Nor was *Slavery* published naively, as the appendices to the

As such it was as if Elkins, despite his proclaimed intention to move the argument on and challenge the terms of "The Old Debate," was in fact in thrall to the mass of traditional evidence, and caught up in the historiographical momentum that propelled orthodox readings of it. Given his provocative thesis and such limited evidentiary tastes or ambitions it is perhaps rather unsurprising that Elkins' work has been so significant an impetus to the re[e]valuation of slave testimony and the revisionism it inspired as the pioneering works of the Bauers, Aptheker or Stamp, or the historiographical chiding of DuBois, Woodson, and Hofstadter.

It was therefore the interaction of these differing historiographical trends – or perhaps the momentum of one and the political incorrectness of the other (and in typifying Elkins' theory as politically incorrect I mean not to suggest that it deserved more credibility than it received, but rather that it was, as well as being inaccurate and evidentially indefensible, also ill-judged and insensitive) – that stimulated the development of a perspective which prioritized histories from slave sources and slaves' perspectives. One of the most influential of these was John Blassingame's *The Slave Community*. Published in 1972, this utilised Slave Narratives in order to present a picture of the plantation in which slaves were able to construct functional communities with their own cultural and social values and which thus provided the bedrock for the development of far more complex personalities than the 'Sambo' thesis allowed. It should therefore be seen as both a response to (and rebuttal of) Elkins's 'Sambo' thesis and as a part of the ongoing movement to re[e]valuate slave

original text reveal. Here, responding to criticisms his theses had garnered when "tried out" at various seminars and conferences, he offers a series of short commentaries on various topics, and of particular interest are his defensive comments under the title "The question of what constitutes 'evidence'" which indicate that the evidential limitations of his thesis had been made clear to him well before the text was in its final draft: "The available manuscript materials, the great bulk of which consists of plantation records, are useful principally on questions of health and maintenance, and they have already been worked over with great care and thoroughness by eminent scholars. If historical scholarship is to be at all cumulative, I should think that, within limits, a willingness to accept and use the work of one's predecessors would be indispensable. But in any case health and maintenance were not questions to which I felt I could make any original contribution." *Ibid.*, 224.

sources; when in 1977 Blassingame followed up the success of *The Slave Community* with the publication of *Slave Testimony*, an anthology of sources that included slave authored letters, Slave Narratives, speeches and interviews, it was surely with the express intention of further enacting this manifesto.²⁷

Equally significant in terms of both its response to the changing historiography and the extent to which it shaped the historiography to come, was Eugene Genovese's *Roll, Jordan, Roll* which might be situated as a reconsideration of the paradox of passivity in the light of the developing consensus around issues of resistance, community, and slaves' self development.²⁸ But Genovese also put a new spin on these questions, asking himself not only why slaves appeared to have accommodated themselves to an institution that was so brutal and exploitative but also by what means could masters have achieved so effective a hegemony? These are issues to which I return in Chapters Eight and Nine in an examination of the way in which some masters sought to utilize epistolary culture as a mechanism for surveillance but in so doing provided slaves with the means to communicate amongst themselves, negotiate with them and even critique their system and formulate plans

²⁷ John Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life In The Antebellum South*, (Oxford, 1979; 1972); *ST*. Other works that have developed Blassingame's foregrounding of slave sources whilst building from a similar base in terms of their focus on community and culture, include such seminal monographs as Charles W. Joyner, *Down by the Riverside: a South Carolina Slave Community*, (Urbana, 1984); Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory And The Foundations Of Black America*, (New York, 1987); and Roger D. Abrahams, *Singing the Master: The Emergence of African American Culture in the Plantation South*, (New York, 1993).

²⁸ *Jordan* was itself the stimulus for a considerable range of scholarship that criticized, complicated and developed the ideas of planter hegemony and slave accommodation, such as Mechal Sobel, *The World They Made Together: Black And White Values In Eighteenth-Century Virginia*, (Princeton, 1987); James Oakes, *Slavery and Freedom: An Interpretation of The Old South*, (New York, 1990); various essays in William W. Freehling's *The Reintegration of American History: Slavery and the Civil War*, (Oxford, 1994); Morris, 'Articulation', 982-1007; Jeffrey Robert Young, *Domesticating Slavery: The Ideological Formation of the Master Class in Georgia and South Carolina, from Colonization to 1837*, (Chapel Hill, 1999); Peter Kolchin, 'Eugene D. Genovese: Historian of Slavery', *RHR*, 88, (2004), 52-67; Diane Miller Sommerville, 'Moonlight, Magnolias, and Brigadoon; or, "Almost Like Being in Love": Mastery and Sexual Exploitation in Eugene D. Genovese's Plantation South', in *ibid.*, 68-82.

to resist and defy it. At this juncture, however, what is important to note is the way in which Genovese's complex theorisation of the nature of planter hegemony and the way in which it afforded slaves opportunities for cultural and communal development was effectively a very subtle response to the paradox of passivity. While he did not deny African American agency, and in fact offered a portrayal of the way in which slaves were able to shape some of their own institutions and manage significant aspects of their own lives that remains highly convincing to this day, he also suggested ways in which the very elements of independence and practices of resistance that made their lives bearable (and here he particularly highlights religion) were also aspects of a paternalistic system which held them in thrall.²⁹

According to this somewhat nihilistic assessment, then, despite the frequency of day to day resistance, and despite the creation of an autonomous, independent, even "proto-nationalistic" African American culture, bondspeople's defensive, accomodationist survival strategies were effectively subverted by a paternalistic institution, since by the very act of making an independent and resistant world in the "interstices of the system" they became "enmeshed... in a web of paternalistic relationships which sustained the slaveholders' regime."³⁰ However brilliant his insights, therefore, in the context of the present discussion the profound problem with Genovese's thesis is that it effectively made many aspects of slave resistance if not meaningless then ultimately self-negating, an analysis which is ultimately unsatisfying, since by decrying the slaves' failure (and I would emphasize how

²⁹ According to this reading slave religiosity was an important factor in terms of individual resistance in that it "gave the one thing [the slaves]... absolutely had to have if they were to resist being transformed into the Sambos they had been programmed to become" by encouraging and endorsing their sense of the equality of humanity and individual worth before God, and thus valorising their awareness of the injustice of slavery. At the same time however, in an analysis which resonated with the orthodox Marxist reading of the perils of religion to the proletariat, he argued that it had the effect of "atomising the slave quarters," blocking "the emergence of political consciousness and a willingness to create legitimate black authority." *Ibid.*, 283-284.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 594.

value-laden this word is) to develop class-consciousness and thus act class-consciously he downplayed the significance of his findings with regard to their successful construction and defence of individual, familial, and communal lives which withstood slaveholders' attempts to reduce them to impersonal (if not dehumanized) factors of production.

Despite these criticisms, however, Genovese's work nonetheless stands as another significant contribution to the burgeoning field of histories of slavery that examined the perspective of the slave and utilised slave sources, and thus must be recognized as adding significantly to the ever increasing momentum of this historiographical trend. So too should we situate the publication of works such as Herbert Gutman's *The Black Family In Slavery And Freedom*, and Albert J. Raboteau's, *Slave Religion*,³¹ within this increasingly dominant trend, since each expressly sought to foreground evidence from the Antebellum Slave Narratives and the WPA interviews³² in analyses that focussed on the black experience of slavery,

³¹ Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family In Slavery And Freedom, 1750-1925*, (Oxford, 1976); Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The 'Invisible Institution' in the Antebellum South*, (Oxford, 2004; 1978). Gutman's work on the family has itself spawned a considerable historiography related to slaves' family and kinship networks, as can be seen in works such as Cheryll Ann Cody, 'There Was No "Absalom" on the Ball Plantations: Slave-Naming Practices in the South Carolina Low Country, 1720-1865', *AHR*, XCII.3, (Jun. 1987), 563-596; Wilma King, *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth-Century America*, (Bloomington, 1995); Brenda E. Stevenson, *Life In Black And White: Family And Community In The Slave South*, (New York, 1996); Rebecca J. Griffin, "'Goin' Back Over There to See That Girl'"; Emily West, *Chains of Love: Slave Couples in Antebellum South Carolina*, (Urbana, 2004). Raboteau's significance is equally apparent in works such as Mechal Sobel, *Trabelin' On: The Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith*, (Westport, 1979); James H. Cone, 'Black Theology in American Religion', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, LIII.4, (1985), 755-771; Margaret Washington Creel, *A Peculiar People: Slave Religion and Community-Culture among the Gullahs*, (New York, , 1988); Thomas J. Durant, Jr., 'The Enduring Legacy of an African-American Plantation Church', *JNH*, LXXX.2, (1995), 81-95; Yvonne Chireau, 'Conjure and Christianity in the Nineteenth Century: Religious Elements in African American Magic', *Religion and American Culture*, VII.2, (Summer, 1997), 225-246; William Courtland Johnson, "'A Delusive Clothing": Christian Conversion in the Antebellum Slave Community', *JNH*, LXXXII.3, (1997), 295-311. It might be argued, however, that each of these works is as indebted to Genovese as to Raboteau.

³² Another neglected source that had began to be re[e]valuated in the 1960 and 1970s through the pioneering work of Rawick, Yetman, and Perdue *et al.* See George Rawick, *From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community*, (Westport, 1973); AS; Norman R. Yetman, 'The Background of

while Lawrence Levine's *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, though it took a different tack, may similarly be placed within this tradition.³³

Moreover, as well as *Slave Testimony*, the 1970s witnessed the publication of a variety of other anthologies of slave authored sources, from the work by Rawick and his acolytes on the WPA narratives and the more general documentary histories assembled by those such as Michael Mullin and Willie Lee Rose, to the publication, in 1974 and 1978 respectively, of two collections which focussed exclusively on slave letters: Robert Starobin's *Blacks in Bondage* and Randall Miller's "*Dear Master*," the former, it should be remembered, being published in memoriam, coming out as it did three years after Professor Starobin took his own life in 1971.³⁴ Between these two collections and *Slave Testimony*, all of which came out within just four years, more than two hundred previously unpublished slave authored letters became widely available to historians of slavery and their students, a remarkable moment in the historiography of the slave letter. As we shall see, however, it has also been a surprisingly ineffectual one given how few historians seem to have recognized the value of this form of slave testimony, at least in comparison to others.

the Slave Narrative Collection', *AQ*, XIX.3, (1967), 534-553; Charles L. Perdue, Jr., Thomas E. Barden, Robert K. Phillips (eds.), *Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia Ex-Slaves*, (Charlottesville, 1976).

³³ Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture And Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery To Freedom*, (Oxford, 1977). Though his work focussed upon analyses of the oral culture of slaves as it survived in folklore, songs, and spiritual belief and practice, Levine nonetheless made use of slave testimony and prioritized black voices and memories in order to attempt to reconstruct bondspeople's perspectives.

³⁴ Michael Mullin (ed.) *American Negro Slavery: A Documentary History*, (New York, 1976); Willie Lee Rose (ed.), *A Documentary History Of Slavery In North America* (Oxford, 1976); *BIB*; *DMLSF*. See also Leslie H. Fishel, Jr. and Benjamin Quarles (eds.), *The Black American: A Documentary History*, (Glenview, 1976; 1967). Originally published as *The Negro American*, this presented documents which spanned the black experience from sixteenth-century African origins to twentieth-century struggles for civil rights, and in its sections on slavery included significant pieces of slave testimony, including two letters: Simon Gray to Andrew Dott, 21 June 1850; Milo Thompson to Louisa Bethley, 15 October 1834; *ibid.*, 113.

But this is to get ahead of the story of the wider movement to re[e]valuate slave testimony, and so to return to the changing of the historiographical and archival guard, it is also worth noting that the 1960s and 1970s witnessed the emergence of a particularly relevant trend: the literary rediscovery of the Slave Narratives. This is perhaps best exemplified by a 1966 essay on black literature by Arna Bontemps which set out an interesting proposition, namely that "Slave narratives... offer a starting point and a key" to the study of modern African American literature because "just as a kind of poetic tradition stemmed from the lyrics of the spirituals, the work songs and playtime rhythms of slave folk, so a prose tradition influential on later Negro writers appears to have originated with the slave narrative."³⁵ And he goes on:

The period in which the slave narrative flourished was, of course, the period in which the Negro spiritual reached its flowering. One was poetry, one was prose. Indeed, words from the spirituals are often quoted in the narratives. But the connection between the narratives and the subsequent literary expression they stimulated is more direct and immediate than that between the spirituals and the music they came to influence.

This link, he asserted, was William Wells Brown, a Slave Narrative writer who is unique in that from these conventional beginnings he forged "what might be called a literary career. Here his place among American Negroes is secure." As such, Bontemps suggested the writers of the Slave Narratives (along with those that passed on and developed the oral tradition of the spirituals) should be seen as forerunners to twentieth century African American writers and poets such as himself who were at the vanguard of the Harlem Renaissance, a connection that he extended to contemporary writers such as Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin.³⁶

³⁵ Arna Bontemps, 'The Negro Contribution to American Letters', in John Davis (ed.), *The American Negro Reference Book*, (Englewood Cliffs, 1966), 863. Bontemps acknowledged previous, if limited scholarship on his subject, citing two unpublished PhD theses: Marion Wilson Starling, *The Slave Narrative: Its Place In American Literary History*, (New York University, 1946); Charles H. Nichols, *A Study of the Slave Narrative*, (Brown University, 1948). Nichols, of course, would go on to publish one of the first collections of slave testimony, *Many Thousand Gone: The Ex-Slaves' Account of their Bondage and Freedom*, (Leiden, 1963), while as has been noted his 1945 *Phylon* article on the Narratives was a significant early contribution to this field.

³⁶ Bontemps, 'Contribution', 870, 873-878 *passim*. Ellison, for one, was not comfortable about this connection. In his introduction to *Narrative*, Gates includes the following quotes from an interview

While drawing attention to this connection may not have been an entirely novel observation, however, Bontemps also asserted something more. Slave Narratives, he argued, should be valued not merely as the antecedents of modern African American literary traditions, nor merely as literary artefacts, but instead as a significant literature in themselves.³⁷ This, then, was a very different form of revaluation which asserted that the value of Slave Narratives was not simply to be found in their historicity, but also in their literary qualities, and in the 1970s Bontemps' ideas began to be taken up by authors such as Houston A. Baker, Jr., Stephen Butterfield and James Page, each of whom picked up on the first (antecedence) if not the second (literary quality) of Bontemps ideas.³⁸ It was not until the end of the decade, however, that a scholarly monograph would explore both in

with Ellison (for which no footnotes are included). In answer to the question of whether *Invisible Man* "borrowed the techniques" of the Narratives, Ellison replied: "No. That's coincidental. And frankly I think too much has been made of the slave narrative, as an influence on contemporary writing.... I wouldn't have had to read a single slave narrative in order to create the narrative pattern of *Invisible Man*. It emerges from experience and my own sense of literary form, out of my sense of experience shaped by history, and my familiarity with literature." Notably, then, Ellison not only distanced himself from the Narratives, but also constructed a view of "literature" that seems to exclude them. Ellison's denial notwithstanding, however, Gates showed himself to be rather more convinced by Arna Bontemps, whom he quotes (again without footnotes), as arguing that: "*Consciously or unconsciously*, all of [the major black writers] reveal in their writing a debt to the narratives, a debt that stands in marked contrast to the relatively smaller obligations they owe the more recognized arbiters of fiction or autobiography" [Gates' emphasis]. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., 'Introduction: The Language of Slavery', in Gates, Davis, *Narrative*, xviii-xxi.

³⁷ Bontemps, 'Contribution', 872.

³⁸ Stephen T. Butterfield, 'The Use of Language in the Slave Narratives', *Negro American Literature Forum*, VI.3. (1972), 72; James A. Page, 'Black Literature', *The English Journal*, LXII.5, (1973), 708. The changing analysis apparent in the work of Houston J. Baker, Jr. reveals just how profound a transformation occurred in the 1970s. In 1971 he stated that "no black American literature of merit was produced during the first 280 years of the black man's history in the United States" and went on to assert that early black poetry and fiction "is of little literary value [and] shows poor craftsmanship and a servile imitation of accepted models in both theme and content... they lacked, that is to say, the stuff of which great literature is made." By 1973, however, Frederick Douglass at least was seen to have written in ways which distinguished his work "from the poorer slave narratives." By contrast in 1980 he began *The Journey Back* with a quotation from Equiano, while Douglass' work was elevated to "one of the finest black American slave narratives, [which] illustrates the autobiographer's quest for being." Houston A. Baker, Jr. (ed.), *Black literature in America*, (New York, 1971), 3-5; *Long Black Song: Essays in Black American Literature and Culture*, (Charlottesville, 1972), 80-83; *The Journey Back: Issues in Black Literature and Criticism*, (Chicago, 1980) 1, 32, [emphasis added].

the detail they deserved; Robert Burns Stepto's *From Behind the Veil*, which offered a sophisticated and nuanced analysis of the literary qualities of the Narratives and their significance to the development of a distinctly African American literary style whilst also situating them in their historical context and thus highlighting their evidentiary value.³⁹

This publication (along with Baker's *The Journey Back*), therefore marked the literary canonisation of the Narratives, and over the next two decades there was an exponential growth in a literature that not only argued for the centrality of ex-slaves' autobiographies in an African American literary tradition that spanned the history of black America, but even took it for granted. As undeniable as such assertions may now appear to be, however, this movement is critically important for two reasons: first, it forced a profitable interdisciplinarity into the study of slavery which also served as a conduit by which literary approaches to the hermeneutic problems posed by slave testimonies would not only enter the historiographical sphere but also become validated by historians, as we shall see below in a discussion of the ways in which gender conscious histories have utilised postmodern theoretical approaches to these texts to find new ways of reading and writing about them; second, given this interdisciplinarity, a sort of feedback loop developed between the practitioners of historical and literary criticism in which each paid increasing attention to the Slave Narratives as the other praised them for their historic or literary value, resulting in an impressive corpus of both intra- and interdisciplinary work, but also productive of a certain dedication to these sources. Thus, however profound and significant this corpus of work has become, I would like to suggest that it has also served to obscure other examples of slave testimony as sites of African American memory, literate self-expression and history.⁴⁰

³⁹ Stepto, *Veil*, 3-31 and *passim*.

⁴⁰ Best known in this corpus is the work of Henry Louis Gates, Jr., his most famous and influential book (at least amongst literary critics) being *Signifying* which built upon his pioneering article 'The

The 1970s thus marked a sea-change in both the historical and literary remembrance of American slavery, and even the comments of historians who questioned the value of slave testimony, or who attempted to call time on the way in which the most excessive forms of “black is beautiful” revisionism seemed to be producing an absurdly idealized view of slave culture, can nonetheless also be read as evidence of the gathering momentum of this renaissance of the slave source.⁴¹ For

“Blackness of Blackness”: A Critique of the Sign and the Signifying Monkey’, *Critical Inquiry*, IX.4, (1983), 685-72. Amongst historians, however, it is *Narrative* (which included a chapter from *Behind the Veil*), that is most often cited, particularly Gates’ introduction [xi-xxiv] which explicitly introduces the Narratives as both historical documents and prototypical examples of African American literature. Equally significant for its interdisciplinarity is John Sekora, Darwin T. Turner (eds.), *The Art of The Slave Narrative: Original Essays In Criticism And Theory*, (Macomb, 1982), while the way in which concern with these texts continued to resonate through the 1990s to the present may be seen in publications such as Carl Plasa, Betty J. Ring (eds.), *The Discourse Of Slavery: Aphra Behn To Toni Morrison*, (London, 1994), as well as Plasa’s monograph on the relation between textual representations and race, *Textual Politics From Slavery To Postcolonialism: Race And Identification*, (Basingstoke, 2000), while Susannah Ashton’s forthcoming book, *BOUND: Black Men as Book Men*, (University Park, Forthcoming), examines the ways in which black authors, both slave and free, utilized texts and textuality as methods of self-production and self-promotion. Nor can one ignore the impact of Toni Morrison’s Nobel Prize winning novel *Beloved*, (New York, 1987), a text that drew on the Slave Narrative tradition and which was written into the conceptual space created by the tension between the narrative as literary memory and the narrative as historical remembering, the space of “rememory” in Morrison’s words, which spawned its own historico-literary industry, represented by works such as Linda Krumholz, ‘The Ghosts of Slavery: Historical Recovery in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*’, *AAR*, XXVI.3, (1992), 395-408; Caroline Rody, ‘Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*: History, “Rememory,” and a “Clamor for a Kiss”’, *ALH*, VII.1, (1995), 92-119; and Angelyn Mitchell’s, *The Freedom To Remember: Narrative, Slavery and Gender in Contemporary Black Women’s Fiction*, (New Brunswick, 2002). However it is in historical and critical works (and my phrasing here is deliberately vague), such as James Olney’s “‘I Was Born’: Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature”, *Callaloo*, 20, (1984), 46-73, John Sekora’s ‘Black Message/White Envelope: Genre, Authenticity, and Authority in the Antebellum Slave Narrative’, *Callaloo*, 32, (1987), 482-515, or Lindon Barrett’s ‘African-American Slave Narratives: Literacy, the Body, Authority’, *ALH*, VII.3, (1995), 415-442, that the interdisciplinarity and consequent ‘feedback’ between literary and historiographical interest in the Narratives is most apparent.

⁴¹ Willie Lee Rose, in a measured assessment of the revisionists’ contribution, commented that it had developed out of the feeling, prevalent in 1960s and ‘70s “that the grave problems we [African Americans] faced were almost exclusively owing to the heritage of bondage.... a sufficiently remote institution to become a scapegoat for contemporary whites and blacks alike.” Black revisionism, then, and particularly the interest in Africa in America, was a response to this belief and a search for historical antecedents to twentieth century black culture. As she argued, however, whilst the “black is beautiful” trend may have been an expression of the particular psychological needs of contemporary black culture, also produced at times hyperbolic praise for enslaved individuals, families and

instance, while Kenneth Stampp's famous repudiation of the availability and reliability of slave testimony might be read as an outright denial of its value, I think it is more appropriately construed as signalling just how pervasive suspicion of such evidence was, even amongst historians such as Stampp who had been so instrumental in stimulating the very revisionism that had forced a new generation of historians to re[e]valuate it. As such the limitations of slave testimony needed to be emphasized, limitations Stampp sought to make plain:

Direct evidence from the slaves themselves is hopelessly inadequate. Well over 90 percent of them were illiterate, and even the small literate minority seldom found an opportunity to write or speak with candor.... [A] few ex-slaves left autobiographies of varying quality. But I know of not a single slave diary; and letters written by slaves are rare.... Inevitably, then, our knowledge of the life and behavior of American Negroes in slavery comes mainly from the testimony of white observers. The letters written by slaves were usually written to white men; the slave autobiographies were often dictated to and written by white men.... In short, the ubiquitous white man, as master, editor, traveler, politician, and amanuensis, stands forever between slave and historian, telling the historian how the slave was treated, how he behaved, what he thought, and what sort of personality he had. However imaginative the historian may be, he will always have trouble breaking through this barrier, and he will always be handicapped by the paucity of firsthand testimony from the slaves themselves.⁴²

By 1980, however, the argument had moved on: no longer did it hinge on the paucity of slave sources but instead proposed that reliance on these sources posed, in David Thomas Bailey's words, a "fundamental methodological problem" because assuming "that men and women speaking about themselves are necessarily the most important and valuable sources... [risked] distorting the record in a manner analogous to that of racist historians of the past decades."⁴³ Similarly in 1983 Peter Kolchin called for a more comparative approach to the history of American slavery, suggesting that the reliance on ex-slave sources had in fact produced an outpouring of histories which were "distorted if not implausible" since they gave far too much credence to former slaves' assertions regarding such issues as the importance and

communities which obscured the suffering, and acute socio-cultural damage slavery inflicted upon them. Willie Lee Rose, *Slavery and Freedom*, William W. Freehling (ed.), (Oxford, 1982), 168-172.

⁴² Stampp, 'Rebels', 367-369.

⁴³ David Thomas Bailey, 'A Divided Prism: Two Sources of Black Testimony on Slavery', *JSH*, XLVI.3. (1980), 383.

cohesiveness of family, kin, and community, and disregarded countervailing (white) voices, comparative evidence, and common sense or as he put it “what we know of the world,” which together tended to cast doubt on the veracity of black recollections of slavery.⁴⁴

These criticisms notwithstanding, however, by the 1980s the traditional histories which foregrounded sources such as plantation records, travellers’ accounts of slavery, or slaveholders’ diaries or correspondence, had been all but swept away by revisionist accounts that highlighted slave testimony (although it should be emphasized this did not always mean a rejection of the ‘traditional’ sources, but rather that they had to share the evidential limelight), in order to make histories which described slaves’ agency, their community and culture, defiance and resistance. Even those historians whose focus meant that they could not place slave testimonies at the heart of their studies still made sure to cite them, and regularly acknowledged that works such as *The Slave Community* had profoundly altered the historiographical landscape, making an awareness of the centrality of slaves as historically active subjects rather than the mere objects of white history a crucial aspect of the rapidly expanding literature on the Antebellum South. For instance, James Oakes’s study of the culture and society of slaveholders, *The Ruling Race*, necessarily utilised slaveholder and other white sources to fill a historiographical

⁴⁴ Peter Kolchin, ‘Reevaluating the Antebellum Slave Community: A Comparative Perspective’, *JAH*, XLVI.3, (1983), 581-582. In fairness it should be emphasized that Kolchin’s call was not for a rejection or devaluation of black testimony, but rather for a more critical approach to it, and indeed in the very next paragraph he cites evidence from the Slave Narratives to call into question the conclusions of those who utilized the WPA evidence to idealize slave family, kinship or communal networks, since a “central feature of almost every Slave Narrative is the trauma caused slaves by forced family separations.” It is tempting to ask, however, why the criticality he rightly calls for does not infect his own reading of this trope of the Slave Narrative, for while the recollections of the WPA interviewees may have been tainted by nostalgia or contain “ritual expressions of love for mother,” so too were the Slave Narratives tainted by their peculiar political purpose, namely an appeal to an abolitionist constituency who made the destructive effects of slavery on family a central part of their critique of the institution. For a discussion of the way in which the Slave Narratives were shaped by a “Master Plan” that included descriptions of the breaking up of slave families see Olney, “Born”, 51.

void he identified as the product of the “succession of often brilliant studies of Afro-American life and culture,” which was that “paradoxically, we now know more about the daily experience of the typical slave than we do about the typical slaveholder.” In addressing his research to this lacuna of the revisionist historiography of slavery, however, he nonetheless felt it necessary to defend not only his subject matter but also his reliance upon the traditional sources, whilst at the same time explicitly commending those “[h]istorians of slave culture that have relied on non-traditional sources,” an analytical strategy which he himself ably executes later on in his text in a chapter that contrasts the attempts of masters to construct rationally ordered plantation regimes to the disruptive effects of slaves’ complex behaviour.⁴⁵

But the 1980s also witnessed the emergence of another crucial trend in the historiography, a focus on the women in slavery. Although this should clearly be situated within the larger social and historiographical context of the feminist movement – and the emergence of a distinctive black feminist movement – revisionist histories also provided a specific impetus, if only because they were written by predominantly male historians operating within a male dominated profession, and thus tended to take an unambiguously gendered approach to their subject, at times displaying a level of chauvinism of which they seemed barely aware.⁴⁶ In *The Slave Community*, for instance, Blassingame simply failed to recognize how problematic his overt concern with the issue of how male slaves

⁴⁵ James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders*, (New York, 1998; 1982), v, xx-xxi, 153-197, esp. 179-191.

⁴⁶ Edward Baptist has recently argued that in fact their gendering of slave history, and their particular structuring of masculinity in which, as he puts it “‘resistance’ has often served as a code word for manhood,” these historians in fact took their cues from male ex-slave and black writers of the nineteenth-century such as David Walker, Lewis Clarke and Frederick Douglass, men who in their turn performed masculinity for an audience that had particular expectations of men as heroic and independent individuals who should be prepared to die for their freedom as opposed to live in bondage. Edward E. Baptist, ‘The Absent Subject: African American Masculinity and Forced Migration to the Antebellum Plantation Frontier’, in Craig Thompson Friend, Lorri Glover (eds.), *Southern Manhood: Perspectives on Masculinity in the Old South*, (Athens, 2004), 139.

maintained their “manhood” was in a text that purported to be about slave communities, not slave men. The text, however, is littered with statements about “the slave” which are clearly gendered such as his assertion that “the typical slave... preserved his manhood in the quarters.” Notably, however, Blassingame asked no questions about how slave women preserved their womanhood, especially in the face of male slaves’ macho posturing “in the quarters,” and this myopic approach to issues of gender even led him to imply that the most significant aspect of the rape and (sexualized) violence of white men toward enslaved women was not the suffering of the female victim but rather the impact it had on the men, just as the break up of families was also most felt by fathers:

The most serious impediment to the man’s acquisition of status in his family was his inability to protect his wife from the sexual advances of whites and the physical abuse of his master.... [while] the most brutal aspect of slavery was the separation of families.... Nothing demonstrated his powerlessness as much as the slave’s inability to prevent forcible sale of his wife and children.”⁴⁷

Inevitably, and justifiably, these kinds of comments caught the attention, and raised the ire, of black feminists such as Angela Davis, bell hooks and Deborah Gray White.⁴⁸ The latter, for example, though she had high praise for the revisionism of the 1970s, commented that Blassingame’s concern with the social rituals and behaviours by which male slaves asserted manhood, masculinity, and status, was not matched by any significant “discussion of the reciprocal activities of slave women.” Going on to comment on the work of other revisionist historians she argued that Gutman “made so much of the role of slave men – in protecting slave women, in naming offspring, in the stabilizing effect of their presence in slave households – that

⁴⁷ Blassingame, *Community*, 225, 322, 172-174. The introduction to the revised edition of *Community* only compounded these errors by belittling slave women’s significance: “While contemplating larger issues raised by reviewers, friends, and critics, I was also led to reconsider some of the minor details.... black and white insanity, slave secular songs, courtship rituals, sexual attitudes, rebel leaders, African survivals, slave women, children, and drivers, and white perceptions of bondsmen” [p. x].

⁴⁸ White, *Woman?; Angela Y. Davis, Women, Race & Class*, (London, 1982; 1981); bell hooks, *Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, (London, 1982; 1981).

women's roles were reduced to insignificance," while Genovese depicted "female slaves [that] did not assert themselves, protect their children, or assume other masculine activities." As such, she concluded, while the revisionist repudiation of Elkins' 'Sambo' thesis was an important historiographical turn, it had restored the male slave's masculinity only "by putting black women in their proper 'feminine' place."⁴⁹

These were sentiments which echoed those of Angela Davis who argued that however significant the work of Genovese, Blassingame, or Gutman (and however execrable that of Elkins or Fogel and Engerman) all had failed to offer any serious discussion of the women in slavery.⁵⁰ Moreover, while she singled out Gutman's analysis of the family as praiseworthy for its effective demolition job on the myth of black matriarchy, "how much more powerful... might [it] have been had he concretely explored the multidimensional role of Black women within the family and within the slave community as a whole."⁵¹ Thus in her assessment only one historian

⁴⁹ Blassingame, *Community*, 80, 85, 88, 92-93, 100-102; Gutman, *Family*; Genovese, *Jordan*, 491-492, 500. All in White, *Woman?*, 21-22 n19, n21, n22.

⁵⁰ Elkins, *Slavery*; Robert William Fogel, Stanley L. Engerman, *Time On The Cross: The Economics Of American Negro Slavery*, (2 Vols., Boston, MA: Little, Brown & Co., 1974); in Davis, *Women*, 4 n5, n7.

⁵¹ Gutman, *Family*, in *ibid.*, 4. This myth is another significant example of the ways in which ideology, popular culture and academic scholarship interact. Popularized by the Moynihan report in 1965, this cultural critique proposed that black families were inherently matrifocal because black men had been emasculated by slavery and therefore made inadequate fathers. While in his references to emasculation, Moynihan's report was clearly influenced by Elkins' 'Sambo' thesis, it was primarily a reworking of the theories presented by the black sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, but when Moynihan projected this already problematic assessment onto contemporary African American families he produced the "tangle of pathology" argument which proposed that the failure of Reconstruction and the ravages of Jim Crow had exacerbated psychological problems slavery had created for the African American male by denying him the right to "strut" like a "bantam rooster or four star general... the very essence of the male animal." The consequence of this, he argued, was that "the Negro community has been forced into a matriarchal structure which, because it is so out of line with the rest of American society, seriously retards the progress of the group as a whole, and imposes a crushing burden on the Negro male and, in consequence, on a great many Negro Women as well." Daniel Patrick Moynihan, 'The Negro Family: The Case for National Action', (Washington, 1965), in Lee Rainwater, William L. Yancey, *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy, including the full text of 'The Negro Family: The Case for National Action' by Daniel Patrick Moynihan*,

of American slavery, Herbert Aptheker, had really done any creditable work on women, arguing that “[o]bservations on the special predicament of Black women slaves can be found in numerous books, articles and anthologies [he] authored and edited.”⁵²

Amongst these early texts, however, it is bell hooks’ polemical *Ain’t I A Woman*, also published in 1982, which contains the most extensive and impassioned attack on both the traditionalists’ and revisionists’ views of black history. It is also perhaps the most profound statement of the way in which slavery and the making of its history were doubly oppressive of black women, and despite the lack of footnotes in hooks’ work it is quite obvious who she was criticizing when she wrote of the “sexist historians and sociologists [who] have provided the American public with a perspective on slavery in which the most cruel and de-humanizing impact of slavery on the lives of black people was that black men were stripped of their masculinity, which they then argue resulted in the dissolution of the black family.” Such a view, she argued, was not only sexist but fundamentally incorrect:

Despite all arguments that claim black men were figuratively castrated, throughout the history of slavery in America black men were allowed to maintain some semblance of their societally defined masculine role.... [because] it was precisely the ‘masculinity’ [strength, virility, vigor and physical prowess] of the African male that the white slaver sought to exploit.... While black men were not forced to assume a role... American society regarded as ‘feminine.’ Black women were forced to assume a ‘masculine’ role. Black women labored in the fields alongside black men, but few if any black men labored as domestics alongside black women in the white household.⁵³

As victims of both racism and sexism, therefore, she suggested that slavery was a greater burden for females than males, for though women laboured as hard as men and faced the same punishments, they could rarely hope for the ‘privilege’/privilege

(Cambridge, 1967), 29. Cf. E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in The United States*, (Chicago, 1966; 1939), 19-21, 49.

⁵² Herbert Aptheker, ‘The Negro Woman’, *Masses and Mainstream*, XI.2 (1949), 10-17; *Revolts; To Be Free: Studies in American Negro History*, (New York, 1969; 1948); *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*, (New York, 1969; 1951); in Davis, *Women*, 3 n2.

⁵³ hooks, *Woman*, 20, 22-23.

of authority and responsibility that male drivers and overseers could achieve (although this is an assertion which has since been called into doubt by writers such as Elizabeth Fox Genovese who argues that in fact slave women's domestic roles afforded significant opportunities to acquire both authority and responsibility),⁵⁴ whilst as breeders of human property and the objects of white sexual assault their bodies were exploited in far more brutal ways than those of their male counterparts. hooks made it explicit, however, that in highlighting the way in which a male oriented historiography had obscured the gender specific nature of black women's sufferings, her intention was "in no way [to] diminish... the sufferings and oppressions of black men," but rather to demonstrate the way in which racism and sexism "intensified and magnified the sufferings of black women," whilst the same twin forces had also served to obscure them and belittle their experiences in the histories.⁵⁵

These pioneering works thus stand in the vanguard of a new, and still vital, movement in the study of slavery which has generated an impressive bibliography and historiographical tradition of its own. Within this one can discern a variety of approaches, from those that focussed strictly on the lives of enslaved women, to those that broadened their focus to examine the ways in which both white (slaveholding) and black (slave) women were enmeshed in the overarching patriarchy of slavery. At the same time, a parallel tradition extended and developed the work of Davis and hooks either by examining the lives of black women in a larger historical context, or by critiquing the historiographical (mis)construction of black womanhood.⁵⁶ All, however, faced a similar problem: like the predominantly

⁵⁴ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill, 1988), 186-187.

⁵⁵ hooks, *Woman*, 23.

⁵⁶ Mary Ellison, 'Resistance to Oppression: Black Women's Response to Slavery in the United States', *S&A*, IV.1, (1983), 56-63; Thelma Jennings, "'Us Colored Women Had to Go Through a Plenty': Sexual Exploitation of African-American Slave Women', *Journal of Women's History*, 1.3,

male historians who sought to challenge the traditional orthodoxy in the historiography of slavery, women seeking to [re]write enslaved women's history were also faced with the problem of testimony. Indeed, this was even more problematic for them than for the revisionists for if the evidence of white men is inadequate to describe the experience of male slaves, how much more so does it fail to transparently describe the subtleties of the gender specific experiences of females? Moreover, while the testimony of high status female travellers and slaveholders may not have been shaped by the chauvinism of their male counterparts, it was nonetheless often inflected by a similar racism as well as by a concern with propriety and femininity that tended to misconstrue and misrepresent slave women's behaviour, and reduce them to stereotypical 'Jezebels', 'Mammys' or 'Mules'.⁵⁷

With regards to the Slave Narratives, although there are a number of significant texts that were written by or about women, such as Elizabeth Keckley's *Behind the Scenes* or Frances H. Green's biographical *Memoirs of Elleanor Eldridge*,

(1990), 45-74; Joan Rezner Gundersen, 'The Double Bonds of Race and Sex: Black and White Women in a Colonial Virginia Parish', *JSH*, LII.3, (1986), 351-372; Fox-Genovese, *Household*; Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*, (New York, 1984); Patricia Morton, *Disfigured Images: The Historical Assault on Afro-American Women*, (New York, 1991). See also Dorothy Sterling (ed.), *We are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth-Century*, (New York, 1984); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, 'Beyond the Sound of Silence: Afro-American Women in History', *G&H*, I.1, (1989), 50-67; Sally Gregory McMillen, *Southern Women: Black and White in the Old South*, (Arlington Heights, 1992); Darlene Clark Hine, *Black Women in America: From Colonial Times Through the Nineteenth Century*, (3 Vols., Oxford, 2005; 1993); Norma J. Burgess, 'Gender Roles Revisited: The Development of the 'Woman's Place' Among African American Women in the United States', *JBS*, XXIV.4. (1994), 391-401; David Barry Gaspar, Darlene Clark Hine (eds.), *More Than Chattel: Black Women And Slavery In The Americas*, (Bloomington, 1996); Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches & Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race and Power in Colonial Virginia*, (Chapel Hill, 1996). Patricia Morton (ed.), *Discovering The Women In Slavery: Emancipating Perspectives On The American Past*, (Athens 1996); Jennifer L. Morgan, "'Some Could Suckle over Their Shoulder": Male Travellers, Female Bodies, and the Gendering of Racial Ideology, 1500-1770', *WMQ*, 3.LIV.1, (1997), 167-192.

⁵⁷ For a discussion of these issues see, for instance, Rupe Simms, 'Controlling Images and the Gender Construction of Enslaved African Women', *G&S*, XV.6, (2001), 879-897; Stephanie M. H. Camp, 'The Pleasures of Resistance: Enslaved Women and Body Politics in the Plantation South', in Baptist, Camp, *New Studies*, 87-126.

the vast majority were written by or for male slaves.⁵⁸ The great exception, of course, is Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* which has proved to be a touchstone for many insightful analyses of the experiences of women in slavery, but then again this is a text that itself had to be rescued from the margins of the archive by a demonstration of its authenticity, the denial of which might itself be seen as the effects of a chauvinistic discourse of heroic male truth versus melodramatic female fiction.⁵⁹ In 1981, however, Jean Fagan Yellin used Jacobs' correspondence to prove that not only her authorship but also the authenticity of her Narrative, while further research led Yellin to be able to identify the various characters in it.⁶⁰ As a result *Incidents* has become canonical, and while it is particularly valued by (feminist) historians seeking to elucidate the lives of slave women, it has also, like the narratives of extraordinary men such as Douglass, come to be valued by literary scholars as a crucial antecedent of African American women's literature. Thus, just as Bontemps placed the works of William Wells Brown in a prototypical relationship with the writings of Ellison, Wright or Baldwin so in *The Freedom To Remember*, Angelyn Mitchell analyses a similar relationship between Harriet Jacobs and Octavia Butler, Sherley Anne Williams and Toni Morrison.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Elizabeth Keckley, *Behind the Scenes, or, Thirty years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House.*, (New York, 1868), (DocSouth, 1999).

⁵⁹ Blassingame, *Community*, 373.

⁶⁰ Jean Fagan Yellin, 'Written by Herself: Harriet Jacobs' Slave Narrative', *AL*, LIII.3, (1981), 479-486; Harriet A. Jacobs, *Incidents In The Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself*, L. Maria Child (ed.); Jean Fagan Yellin (ed./int.), (Cambridge, 2000; 1987); Jean Fagan Yellin, *Harriet Jacobs: A Life*, (New York, 2004).

⁶¹ Angelyn Mitchell, *Freedom*, 22-41. Cf. Beth Maclay Doriani, 'Black Womanhood in Nineteenth-Century America: Subversion and Self-Construction in Two Women's Autobiographies', *AQ*, XLIII.2, (1991), 199-222; Harriet Mullen, 'Runaway Tongue: Resistant Orality in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Our Nig*, *Incidents in the Life of A Slave Girl*, and *Beloved*', in Shirley Samuels, *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in 19th Century America*, (New York, 1992), 244-264; Cutter, 'Dismantling'; Jennifer Fleischer, *Mastering Slavery: Memory, Family, and Identity in Women's Slave Narratives*, (New York, 1996), 61-92; Kimberly Drake, 'Rewriting the American Self: Race, Gender, and Identity in the Autobiographies of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs', *MELUS*, XII.4, (1997), 91-108; Karen E. Beardslee, 'Through Slave Culture's Lens Comes the

The majority of the Slave Narratives were, however, written by men and are in many ways just as problematic as the evidence of white witnesses since as well as being constrained by their own gender subjectivity and constructions of the feminine role and place and thus displaying limited sensitivity with regard to the subtleties of the female experience of slavery, they also wrote with an eye for their audience's concern with sexual propriety and sexual vulnerability. Thus, in texts such as Frederick Douglass' *Narrative*, William Wells Brown's *Clotel*, or Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave*, the writers' propagandistic intentions and sometimes chauvinist outlooks generally led them to offer only objectified and/or victimized portrayals of slave women whose conformity or non-conformity to prevailing gender stereotypes made them appropriate subjects for moralizing discourse rather than sympathetic analysis, rendering most of their female characters two dimensional and discounting or discrediting their experiences, actions and persons as relevant only insofar as they demonstrated either defilement or disgrace, noble sacrifice or ignoble promiscuity.⁶²

But according to Deborah Gray White the problem with the sources went even deeper, and her insightful analysis of the conundrum of the ever-present yet ever-absent female in the archives is worth quoting at length because it presages not only the novel theoretical, comparative and interdisciplinary approaches that many

Abundant Source: Harriet A. Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, *MELUS*, XIV.1, (1999), 37-58.

⁶² Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of The Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself*, (Boston, 1845), 6, (DocSouth, 1999); William Wells Brown, *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States. By William Wells Brown, A Fugitive Slave, Author of "Three Years in Europe." With a Sketch of the Author's Life*, (London, 1853), 62-64, (DocSouth, 2004); Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New-York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853*, (Auburn, 1853), 65, (DocSouth, 1997). Cf. Kristin Hoganson, 'Garrisonian Abolitionists and the Rhetoric of Gender, 1850-1860', *AQ*, XLV.4, (1993), 564-569; M. Giulia Fabi, 'The "Unguarded Expressions of the Feelings of the Negroes": Gender, Slave Resistance, and William Wells Brown's Revisions of *Clotel*', *AAR*, XXVII.4, (1993), 641-645; Krista Walter, 'Trappings of Nationalism in Frederick Douglass's *The Heroic Slave*', *AAR*, XXXIV.2, (2000), 233-247.

other gender conscious historians would come to rely upon in the twenty years since White was writing, but also their choice of source material:

Source material on the general nature of slavery exists in abundance, but it is very difficult to find source material about the slave women in particular. Slave women were everywhere, yet nowhere. They were in Southern households and in Southern fields but the sources are silent about female status in the slave community and the bondswoman's self-perception. In fact, the material sheds little light upon the way sex and race shaped her self-concept....

For this reason it is often necessary to make inferences. I relied heavily on the Works Project Administration interviews with female ex-slaves. I found them the richest, indeed almost the only black female source dealing with female slavery. I have studied them in the light of what anthropologists know about women who do similar things in analogous settings.... This approach obviously presents problems since the bonded women's circumstances were unique.⁶³ However, it may be the best way available to handle this rather difficult topic.

Though I wholeheartedly endorse these sentiments, the particular attention that she and many others have paid to these testimonies is significant because while these interviews had already been utilised by the revisionists, feminist readings of them were not only novel but also served to re-secure their centrality in the archive of ex-slave sources. This is not to suggest, of course, that they were in danger of losing their value for despite the fact that the 1980s saw some criticism of their transparency (and indeed they must be treated with great care given the exigencies of their production and the time that elapsed between the events they record and the moment of recollection), they have remained highly significant sources to which many historians of slavery continue to turn.⁶⁴ Rather it is to suggest that such emphasis on the value of this set of sources has, yet again, served to obscure others, and as we have already seen there is enough correspondence from female slaves to make their letters another essentially important source of female slave testimony. Such unfortunate side effects aside, White's proposition that the WPA testimony

⁶³ White, *Woman?*, 22-24.

⁶⁴ For a recent analysis that makes excellent use of the WPA sources and relates them to the Narratives in ways which call into question just how much ex-slave authorship was bounded by their white sponsors see Edward E. Baptist, "'Stol' and Fetched Here": Enslaved Migration, Ex-Slave Narratives, and Vernacular History', in Baptist, Camp, *Studies*, 243-274.

must be treated with an anthropological concern for the complexities of self-[re]construction must be seen as significant and influential for by bringing such theoretical approaches to these texts feminist historians of slave women have found new ways to read them and thus value them. As H  l  ne Lecaudey observes:

The slave Narrative Collection is... one of the few sources available for examining slave women's testimony on the institution of slavery and their own experiences, inclusive of their sexual experiences.... [and] through recognition and analysis of the biases inherent to the oral slave narratives... these narratives can validly be interpreted as expressive of the actual experience and perspectives of former slaves, particularly women.⁶⁵

The influence of feminist and gendered approaches to the history of slavery on the re[e]valuation of slave testimony was thus profound in that while the resultant scholarship may be situated within the prevailing revisionist orthodoxy in its concern with exploring slavery from the standpoint of the slave and by reference to slave sources (however much it also challenged the orthodox readings of such evidence), it also sought to move beyond the limitations of these newly valued testimonies, turning not only to the anthropological, interdisciplinary and comparative techniques suggested by White, but also to postmodern theorists' approaches to textual analysis, and it is of course worth keeping in mind that by the 1980s and increasingly in the 1990s the ideas of Derrida, Foucault, and Hayden White in particular were beginning to have a certain ubiquity.⁶⁶ Moreover, even if such approaches were still treated with suspicion in some circles, there was in any case such a significant overlap

⁶⁵ Hélène Lecaudey, 'Behind the Mask: Ex-slave women and interracial sexual relations', in Morton, *Discovering*, 260, 264. Cf. Brenda E. Stevenson, 'Gender Convention, Ideals, and Identity among Antebellum Virginia Slave Women', in Gaspar, Hines, *Chattel*, 169-172.

⁶⁶ For an analysis of the impact of these thinkers in particular see, for instance, Dominick Lacapra, 'Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts', *H&T*, XIX.3, (1980), 245-276; Allan Megill, 'The Reception of Foucault by Historians', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XLVIII .1, (1987), 117-141; Hans Kellner, 'Narrativity in History: Post-Structuralism and Since', *H&T*, XVI.4, (1987), 1-29; F. R. Ankersmit, 'Historiography and Postmodernism', *H&T*, XXVIII.2, (1989), 137-153; *idem*, 'Hayden White's Appeal to the Historians', *H&T*, XXXVII.2, (1998), 182-193; Richard T. Vann, 'The Reception of Hayden White', *ibid.*, 143-161; Sylvère Lotringer, Sande Cohen (eds.), *French Theory in America*, (New York, 2001), especially *eadem*, 'Introduction: A Few Theses on French Theory in America', 1-12.

between the postmodern, feminist and gender theorists that it is unsurprising to find that many of these gender conscious writers displayed a greater willingness to engage with explicitly postmodern approaches to their sources, and a greater propensity to acknowledge the value of interdisciplinary analyses than might be found elsewhere in the historiography.⁶⁷

A good example of this may be seen in Sadiya Hartman's 1996 article 'Seduction and the Ruses of Power' which was inspired by Melton McLaurin's analysis of the trial and execution of a slave named Celia who, after having been repeatedly raped by her master, Robert Newsom, had killed him rather than allow him to do it again.⁶⁸ In *Celia, A Slave*, however, McLaurin sometimes struggled to find a way to make the evidence of the trial transcripts speak to larger issues of the politics and ideology of slavery and abolition and as such had focussed upon the way in which her lawyer, James Jameson, (who thus becomes one of the heroes of the piece) sought to make her case an attack on the institution of slavery via asserting her right to self-defence.⁶⁹ By contrast, Hartman's approach is to begin with a rather subtler analysis that situates Celia's experiences in terms of the ways in which the intersection of 'race' and gender, slavery and sexual vulnerability problematize the concept of rape; indeed, as Hartman observes, because in the eyes of the law Celia

⁶⁷ Of course the proliferation of literary scholarship on the Slave Narratives meant that the effects of the 'linguistic turn' were already being felt in history and cultural studies departments in the 1980s, as is exemplified by the influence of scholars such as Gates, Sekora and Appiah.

⁶⁸ Saidiya Hartman, 'Seduction and the Ruses of Power', *Callaloo*, XIX.2, (1996), 537-538; Melton McLaurin, *Celia, A Slave*, (New York, 1999; 1991).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 95-96, 111-113. See also Annette Gordon-Reed, 'Celia's Case', in *eadem* (ed.), *Race and Law: Law and Justice in American History*, (Oxford, 2003), 48-60, where Gordon-Reed, who shares McLaurin's tragic/heroic reading of the incident, nonetheless construes its significance in slightly different terms; whereas McLaurin praises Celia's lawyers for offering a defence that rivalled that of Dred Scott's lawyers for its audacity in that had they won their case it had potential to destroy the system from within, Gordon-Reed instead acknowledges, as they must have, that the case was unwinnable from the outset (indeed, she suggests that it is likely the only reason that Newsom's family were prepared to countenance a trial was that there "was no real gamble in letting the trial run its course") and so praises them for the fact that "as lawyers who worked within the confines of the legal system of the day, Celia's lawyers did the best they could with very little." [53, 58-59]

was both her master's property and a person, albeit with limited rights, the court addressed itself solely to Robert Newsom's murder and could only repress and negate the rape. She thus constructs the incident not as a heroic courtroom drama, nor indeed as a tragic incident of lost innocence, but instead as an exemplar of the liminality of the female slaves' sexual agency.⁷⁰ For with the repression and negation of master-slave rape as a concept, which was the necessary corollary of the ideal of the perfect submission of the slave to their master, came the construction of the willing, seductive, and concupiscent black female. Moreover, Hartman argues, such a construction calls into question the very ways in which gender is utilised as a transhistorical category:

[T]oo often it has been argued that the enslaved female exists outside of the gendered universe because she was not privy to the entitlements of bourgeois women within the white patriarchal family. As a consequence gender becomes a descriptive for the social and sexual arrangements of the dominant order rather than an analytical category. As well, it enchants the [slaveholder] discourse of protection and mystifies its instrumental role in the control and disciplining of the body, and, more importantly, maintains the normativity of the category of "woman." What I am attempting to explore... is the divergent production of the category woman, rather than a comparison of black and white women which implicitly or inadvertently assumes that gender is relevant only to the degree that generalizable and universal criteria define a common identity.⁷¹

Beyond the significance Hartman's analysis should thus have for our understanding of such issues as the relationship between Jefferson and Hemings, or between other slaves such as Virginia Boyd and their sexually predatory masters (see Chapter Seven below) what is exemplary about this text is the way in which it was so clearly shaped by the influence postmodern theorists, in particular Baudrillard, Bourdieu, Foucault, Spivak and Žižek, a combination that is itself indicative of the problem Hartman is trying to elucidate: Foucault shapes her understanding of the way in which the body of the enslaved embodies the disciplinary discourses that

⁷⁰ McClaurin, in a sense following Jameson, begins his own account by emphasising that Newsom, a widower with four adult children, purchased the fourteen year old slave to be his "concubine" and raped her even before he got her home. McClaurin, *Celia*, 9-11. For a discussion of the use of this term see 165 n3 below.

⁷¹ Hartman, 'Seduction', 556

define her;⁷² Žižek and Spivak explain the way in which a given discourse or “social fantasy” not only serves to obscure antagonistic discourses, but in fact to make them inconceivable;⁷³ Baudrillard and Bourdieu afford her a theoretical vantage point from which to re-read and re-evaluate trial testimonies, for by utilizing their understandings of “seduction” as a theory of power by which the subordinate are perceived to dominate the superordinate, she reconstructs a white world view in which the culture of sentiment that binds the master to his slave, and conditions the “perfect submission” of the slave to master, was facilitated and justified by a “discourse of seduction” that constructed Celia, and not Newsom, as responsible and indeed culpable for both the sexual relationship and the murder.⁷⁴

As I have already suggested, then, such concern with discursive practice reflected broader intellectual debates which were shaping scholarship in diverse fields from sociology to anthropology, literary studies to history, central to which was the re-conceptualization of a number of critically interconnected issues that would profoundly influence the understanding of slavery. Crucial to this process was a growing recognition that ‘race’ and racial identity (or indeed gender and gender identity) were not transhistorical categories, nor biological certainties, but contingent

⁷² Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, Mark Hurley (trans.), (New York, 1980), 75-132, 133-159, cited in *ibid.*, 541 n12, 542 n15.

⁷³ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, (London, 1989), 126; *idem*, ‘Beyond Discourse Analysis’, in Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of our Time*, (London, 1990), 254; Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Feminism and Deconstruction Again: Negotiations’, in *eadem*, *Outside In The Teaching Machine*, (New York, 1993), 121-140; cited in Hartman, ‘Seduction’, 544 n24, 545 n26, 560. By citing both Spivak and Žižek, both of whom have regularly acknowledged the significant influence Jacques Derrida has had on their own thinking, Hartman is conspicuously invoking the spirit of Derridean deconstruction.

⁷⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Richard Nice (trans.), (Cambridge, 1977), n.p.; Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction*, Brian Singer (trans.), (New York, 1979), 83; cited in Hartman, ‘Seduction’, 545-7. Hartman also utilizes the concept of seduction to pull apart the proslavery rhetoric of George Fitzhugh, rightly identifying him as deploying the culture of sentiment and discourse of seduction as a way to portray masters as the subjects of their slaves and thus sanctify slavery as a system where the masters’ interests are subordinate to the welfare of the slave: George Fitzhugh, *Cannibals all! or, Slaves Without Masters*, C. V. Woodward (ed.), (Cambridge, 1971), 204-205, cited in *ibid.*, 547-9.

social constructions which needed to be appropriately historicized and situated. Then, too, there was an increasing interest in the nature of the relationship between the dominant and the dominated, and the construction of the 'other' as a means of constituting the 'self'. Furthermore, there has been the 'discovery' of the postcolonial subject, the hybridized self that writes from the margins yet is inextricably bound by the very discursive practices it seeks to critique. Represented by works from such diverse scholars as Orlando Patterson, James C. Scott, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Evelyn Higginbotham, together these theoretical shifts have had important effects upon historical understandings of 'race', gender, and power and thus upon the interpretative frameworks that many historians now utilize in analysing slavery and, more specifically slave texts from the Narratives through to the WPA interviews.⁷⁵ Moreover, one should note that this impact has not been limited to the work of 'radical' feminists and black nationalists, and that interdisciplinarity and the effects of the linguistic turn in academia has now become a very common aspect of the writing of African American history and the assessment of African American sources. Thus the sociologist Orlando Patterson is cited by such 'traditional' historians as Robert William Fogel and David Brion Davis, James C. Scott's anthropological insights inform the writings of W. Fitzhugh Brundage and Heather Williams, while Gates and Higginbotham are cited by none less than Ira Berlin.⁷⁶

But Berlin's monographs also exemplify the current orthodoxy in that the emphasis is upon slaves' perspectives on the experience of slavery read through

⁷⁵ Patterson, *Death*; Scott, *Domination*; Gates, 'Race'; Higginbotham, 'Metalanguage'.

⁷⁶ Patterson, *Death* cited in Fogel, *Consent*, 188, 194, 197; Davis *Inhuman*, 28, 30-32, 36-39, 51-52, 94. Scott, *Domination*, cited in W. Fitzhugh Brundage, 'The Roar on the Other Side of Silence Black Resistance and White Violence in the American South, 1880-1940', in *idem.* (ed.), *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South*, (Chapel Hill, 1997), 273; Williams, *Self-Taught*, 5. Gates, "Race", 1-20, cited in Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries Of Slavery In North America*, (Cambridge, 1998), 379 n1; Higginbotham, 'Metalanguage', 251-74, cited *loc. cit.*; Patterson, *Death*, 5-6, cited 379 n4; Meillassoux, *Womb*, 99-100, cited *loc. cit.* Cf. Patterson, *Death*, cited in Berlin, *Generations*, 4 n3; Claude Meillassoux, *The Anthropology Of Slavery: The Womb Of Iron And Gold*, Alide Dasnois (trans.), (London, 1991), cited *loc. cit.*, 33 n24; Gilroy, *Atlantic*, cited 25 n2.

slave testimony from the Narratives, the WPA interviews and even, on occasion, from slave and ex-slave letters, testimony which at the very least is used to problematize the slaveholder and white testimony upon which such extensive and ambitious analyses necessarily depend. So too is the day to day round of resistance an important theme of Berlin's analysis, and in his acknowledgement of the significance of slaves' practices of resistance, be they cultural or economic, communal or individual, drastic or mundane, he again reflects the consensus that has emerged from the diverse range of revisionist studies that have marked the transformation of the historiography of slavery over the past three or four decades. Moreover, and as one would expect from Berlin, both *Generations of Captivity* and *Many Thousands Gone* demonstrate an impressive concern with temporal and regional variations, as well as paying significant attention to the different meanings slavery had in urban and rural settings, in agricultural, domestic, and industrial workplaces, in large and small communities, and for women and men.⁷⁷ In all these

⁷⁷ Berlin was of course a pivotal figure in the development of a more microhistorical approach to slavery which emphasized regional and temporal variation as crucial analytical issues, and his article 'Time, Space, and the Evolution of Afro-American Society on British Mainland North America', stands as an important landmark in this significant historiographical turn. See also, Philip D. Morgan, 'Black Life in Eighteenth Century Charleston', *Perspectives in American History*, 1, (1984), 187-232; Barbara Jeanne Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on The Middle Ground: Maryland During the Nineteenth Century*, (New Haven, 1985); Julia Floyd Smith, *Slavery and Rice Culture in Low Country Georgia, 1750-1860*, (Knoxville, 1985); Loren Schweninger, 'The Underside of Slavery: the Internal Economy, Self-Hire, and Quasi-Freedom in Virginia, 1780-186', *S&A*, XII.2, (1991), 1-22; Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans In Colonial Louisiana: The Development Of Afro-Creole Culture In The Eighteenth Century*, (Baton Rouge, 1992); Betty Wood, *Women's Work, Men's Work: The Informal Slave Economies of Lowcountry Georgia*, (Athens, 1995); Lorena S. Walsh, *From Calabar to Carter's Grove: The History of a Virginia Slave Community*, (Charlottesville, 1997); Robert Olwell, *Masters, Slaves, & Subjects: The Culture Of Power In The South Carolina Low Country, 1740-1790*, (Ithaca, 1998). Berlin has also been instrumental, along with Philip D. Morgan, in pioneering research into the ways in which slaves' economic activities served as a significant aspect of their resistance, and their two editorial collaborations stand out in this regard: *The Slaves' Economy: Independent Production By Slaves In The Americas*, (London, 1991); *Cultivation And Culture: Labor And The Shaping Of Slave Life In The Americas*, (Charlottesville, 1993). On urban slavery see Richard C. Wade, *Slavery In the Cities: The South, 1820-1860*, (Oxford, 1964); Claudia Dale Goldin, *Urban slavery in the American South, 1820-1860: A Quantitative History*, (Chicago, 1976); Rodney Dale Green, 'Urban Industry, Black Resistance, and Racial Restriction in the Antebellum South: A General Model and a Case Study in Urban Virginia', *Journal of Economic*

respects, therefore, Berlin's work reflects the way in which a revisionism that might once have been typified as no more than a minor manifestation of resistance to the overwhelming historiographical inertia of tradition has now itself acquired so much momentum as to have profoundly reshaped our conceptions of how to make histories of American slavery, replacing overarching historical narratives of a monolithic 'Peculiar Institution' with a diverse range of slave studies that conceptualize the subject of slavery in America as a diverse, changeable, and historically contingent series of institutional arrangements that is best comprehended from the ground up.

Perhaps most significantly, however, by placing African Americans and their testimony at the heart of its concerns, this new orthodoxy also foregrounded the slave self, and in many ways it is tempting to see this as yet another innovation, a response to and rejection of 'Sambo', 'Nat', and 'Jack', 'Jezebel', 'Mammy' and 'Mule'. But this concern with the constitution and/or construction of the African American self in slavery predates both Elkins' psychoanalysis and Blassingame's gendered analysis, and is in fact (to borrow Elkins' term) an essential part of "The Old Debate" that has underpinned not only the historiography but also the history of pro- and antislavery in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries. Thus before considering the fate of the slaves' letters and the reasons that they remain the most underutilised source on slavery, despite the major re[e]valuation of ex-slave testimony that has marked the macro-historiographic revolution of the past four or five decades, I would like to briefly sketch out a micro-historiography of this debate over the slave self and offer a

History, XLI.1, (1981), 189-191; Midori Takagi, "Rearing wolves to our own destruction": *Slavery in Richmond, Virginia, 1782-1865*, (Charlottesville, 1999). On industrial slavery see Robert S. Starobin, *Industrial Slavery in the Old South*, (New York, 1970); Charles B. Dew, 'Disciplining Slave Ironworkers in the Antebellum South: Coercion, Conciliation, and Accommodation', *AHR*, LXXIX.2, (1974), 393-418; *idem*, *Bond of Iron: Master and Slave at Buffalo Forge*, (New York, 1994); Donnie D. Bellamy, 'Macon, Georgia, 1823-1860: A Study in Urban Slavery', *Phylon*, XLV.4, (1984), 298-310; Ronald L. Lewis, *Coal, Iron, and Slaves: Industrial Slavery in Maryland and Virginia*, (Westport, 1979); T. Stephen Whitman, 'Industrial Slavery at the Margin: The Maryland Chemical Works', *JSH*, LIX.1, (1993), 31-62; John Bezis-Selfa, 'A Tale of Two Ironworks: Slavery, Free Labor, Work, and Resistance in the Early Republic', *WMQ*, 3.LVI.4, (Oct. 1999), 677-700.

critique of the methodologies that have often been used to study it, for as much as the historico-literary emphasis on the Slave Narratives and the rediscovery of the uses and limitations of the WPA interviews, I think that it is in the methodological approaches that have been taken to the study of the self that one can find further reasons why the slaves' letters remain the poor cousin to these other forms of slave testimony.

Chapter Four

Self, Psychohistory, and Stuttering:

The search for African American personalities in slavery

Nothing is more elusive than the psychology of the slave.

Moses I. Finley, (1983)¹

As has been shown in the previous chapter, then, the revisionist tide that swept away so much of the established orthodoxy about slaves and slavery in the American South was concerned with recovering the perspective of bondpeople, an appreciation of their culture and a focus on their communal lives, a refocusing of attention which was accompanied by a “black is beautiful” movement that valorised black above other sources and yet, in its appropriation of anthropological, sociological and above all literary techniques for reading such evidence, saw the slave letters eclipsed by ex-slave testimony. Indeed, no matter how often Slave Narratives, African American folklore, or ex-slave interviews, letters and claims for war pensions are generically referred to as ‘slave testimony,’ they are by their very nature the testimonies of ex-slaves, and while I do not mean to devalue these sources, I would like to suggest that this categorical slippage has devalued bondpeople’s letters as a prototypical form of slave testimony. But in and of itself this is an insufficient explanation – the slaves’ letters were ‘there’ in the 1970s, were published as part of the “black is beautiful” movement – and I do not think that their relative absence from the historiography is simply the product of the historico-literary feedback loop that developed around the Narratives nor the sociological cult of the folkloric that grew around the interviews, though both were no doubt important

¹ Moses I. Finley, *Economy and Society in Ancient Greece*, Brent D. Shaw and Richard Shaller (eds./int.), (Harmondsworth, 1983; 1981), 108, in Bertram Wyatt Brown, ‘The Mask of Obedience: Male slave psychology in the Old South’, *AHR*, XCIII.5, (1988), 1231.

factors. Instead, to fully understand why they seem to have become so marginalized I think it is necessary to examine the intersection of two significant trends: the central historical and historiographical significance of assessments of the slaves' personalities, and the way in which in the 1960s and '70s the study of these personalities became the object of psychohistorical inquiry, for as will be shown such a focus on and objectification of identity has had profound implications not only in terms of valorising ex-slave testimony and qualifying the value of the letters to the point of virtual irrelevance, but also in constructing hierarchies of knowledge where direct testimony from the 'objects' of study is not only seen as troublesome but even deemed largely irrelevant.

In terms of the centrality of the slave's self, then, I would suggest, at the risk of being overly reductive, that questions regarding bondpeople's personalities – meaning the visible manifestation of their interior self-concepts – have always been at issue. Was s/he by nature submissive or defiant, jocular or depressed, assertive, passive, resigned, resistant, tragically damaged or triumphantly whole? Was s/he shaped by 'race' or slavery, by masters or by other slaves? Was s/he consistent or contradictory, honest or dissembling, individualistic and selfish or generous and social? Questions such as these, and the assumptions which form/inform their answers, go to the heart of the study of slavery and the ways in which slave history has been made and remade, for to assume any given response to them is to set interpretive limits on the evidence of slaves' behaviour and the uses of their testimony beyond which it is impossible to think.

To return, for a moment, to the Bauers' study of slave resistance, it is clear that they did not uncover a trove of new evidence that had never before seen the light of day (although they did, of course bring the traditional sources into tension with different sources of testimony) but rather reinterpreted the evidence on the basis of a different set of assumptions: if, as many slaveholders, white travellers and abolitionists had assumed, African Americans were by nature docile, subservient and passive, if occasionally given to animalistic passions and violent outbursts, then

clearly their actions had to be interpreted as testifying to such personality traits, rendering everything from the destruction of farm implements to the burning of crops testimony to their clumsiness rather than their defiance, since defiance was simply not conscionable in a more or less contented slave; but if one assumed instead that slaves were defiant, self-aware and discontented yet also rational and able to reason that direct retaliation against masters and their agents was ultimately likely to be self-defeating, then such actions could be read as aspects of resistance, a view which they sum up in the observation that slaves were “frequently rebellious, and almost always sullen, *as any person* faced with a disagreeable situation from which he cannot escape will normally be.”²

Many other examples come to mind from both “The Old Debate” over slavery and more recent arguments, and indeed as we have already seen these same questions certainly haunt both the historiography that the Bauers were repudiating and the new historiographic tradition which their intervention announced. So long as historians such as Ulrich B. Phillips or William A. Dunning were prepared to assume that Africans and African Americans were racially inferior, an assumption that as Raymond Gaita has argued is predicated precisely upon constructions of the interior self of the lesser being as essentially stunted and abnormal, or else to argue, as did Stanley Elkins or George M. Frederickson and Christopher Lasch that slavery had so damaged the African American psyche as to render these selves dysfunctional, then all subsequent analyses of behaviour, or indeed testimony, followed from this basic premise.³ Similarly, so long as the slaves’ white contemporaries could not (or would

² Bauer, Bauer, ‘Resistance’, 418. [emphasis added]

³ Gaita defines racism of “the kind that is usually connected to skin colour” as “the incapacity on the part of racists to see that anything could go deep in the inner lives of their victims. For such racists it is literally unintelligible that parenthood or sexuality, for example, could mean to ‘them’ – the victims of such racial denigration – what it does to ‘us’, just as it is unintelligible that we could see in a face that looked to us like the Black and White Minstrel Show’s caricature of the Afro-American face, all the magnificence and misery of Othello.” Raymond Gaita, *A Common Humanity: Thinking About Love and Truth and Justice*, (London, 2000; 1998), xxv.

not) allow that the feelings of black people, their personalities, self-concepts and identity constructions were equivalent to their own, they could justify slavery in non-empathetic terms which permitted them to portray the runaway as suffering from a disease, the slave woman who did not fight off a sexual predator as a seductress, or the arsonist as an idiot, rather than recognizing in their slaves' actions what they themselves would do in similar situations.

There is, however, a parallel stream of thought about slave personality, namely the slave-as-dissembler thesis. Like the arguments about intrinsic equality/inequality, and/or degradation and imposed or learned inferiority, this too formed a part of "The Old Debate" just as much as it has been taken up in the new ones, and here again the Bauers' argument is instructive for in its very essence it is predicated on dissembling: if slaves presented themselves as stupid, clumsy and ignorant this was only to create a space for acts of resistance and to play to a discourse which would make such acts not only comprehensible but also, at least to an extent, forgivable. So too can we trace the argument both forwards into the revisionist and post-revisionist orthodoxies and backwards into the antebellum debates over slavery. For instance, writing in her diary during the Civil War, Mary Boykin Chesnut observed that the slaves "go about in their black masks, not a ripple of emotion showing and yet on all other subjects except the War they are the most excitable of all races. Now Dick may be a very respectable Egyptian Sphinx, so inscrutably silent is he."⁴ Compare this to a more contemporary manifestation of the slave-as-dissembler paradigm:

Slaves could not be trusted or believed, and slave owners everywhere assumed that they were liars and thieves. There was, of course, a great deal of truth to their fears. Slaves needed to deceive, needed to steal, needed to be less industrious than expected, to survive in so hostile a world. From their deceptions came security.... What slave

⁴ Mary Boykin Chesnut, *A Diary from Dixie, as Written by Mary Boykin Chesnut, Wife of James Chesnut, Jr., United States Senator From South Carolina, 1859-1861, and Afterward an Aide to Jefferson Davis and a Brigadier-General in the Confederate Army*, Isabella D. Martin and Myrta Lockett Avery (eds.), (New York, 1905), 225, (DocSouth, 1997).

owners saw as vice, slaves saw as virtue, and from the slaves' ability to twist the system in these ways, slaves were able to help each other.⁵

But I do not wish to belabour this issue nor its connections to the issue of self versus personality; suffice it to say that between Chesnut and Walvin the argument has transformed from one which deprecated dissembling to one which valorised it, an approach that can be seen in analyses as diverse as Lawrence Levine's, Orlando Patterson's and James C. Scott's.⁶ Nor, I hope, is it necessary to do more than point out that in the common humanity argument there are also strong continuities not only in terms of the absolute expressions of inequality and equality, but also in terms of the weak version of equality/inequality which acquiesces to the principle of a shared humanity but allows psychological, social, and cultural damage to render it moot, if tragic; such positions were taken by many an abolitionist, colonisationist or defender of slavery just as they were adopted to defend the 'Sambo' or "Tangle of Pathology" theses. Instead I would like to take these points as read and move on to a brief examination of how this central concern with slaves' personalities has become complicated by psychohistory.

Richard King has recently argued that in the 1950s there emerged in American academia a pronounced "preoccupation with the relationship between the individual and society" which focussed upon "the nagging problem of conformity" and was almost obsessed with "the relationship between culture and personality."⁷ Amongst adherents to this new cult of the individual there were on the one hand

⁵ James Walvin, *Questioning Slavery*, (New York, 1996), 132. The idea that slaves were highly talented deceivers who not only practiced dissembling in their day to day interactions with white authorities but also carried this habit into freedom and thus wrote deceitful Narratives (on which point see, for instance, Keith Byerman, 'We Wear The Mask: Deceit as Theme and Style in Slave Narratives', in Sekora, Turner, *Art*, 70-82), is clearly an important one and it is not in dispute here, but an important qualification is that it seems to imply that such dissembling is an exceptional trait, whereas the unique historical document is surely the one that does *not* deceive.

⁶ Levine, *Culture*, 121-133; Patterson, *Death*, 93-97, 199-208; Scott, *Domination*, 2-6, 24-28, 33-34;

⁷ Richard H. King, 'Domination and Fabrication: Re-thinking Stanley Elkins' *Slavery*', *S&A*, XXII.2, (2001), 2.

those that posited that self and personality be understood in Freudian terms, and so suggested that they were the twin products of the tension between biologically and socially determined behaviour, the latter a partial and contingent representation resulting from the repression of the former. On the other hand the behaviourists drew upon neo-Freudian ideas in their construction of symbolic interactionist and interpersonal theories, formulations which downplayed the elements of biological determinism and instead considered the ways in which personality was a product of the tension between the role-playing social being as they were formed in interaction with society and/or with significant others, and their essential identity or interior self-concept, thus giving primacy to cultural and social pressures for conformity.⁸ What both camps shared in common, however, was the perception that the tension between self and society could be productive of psychologically damaging neuroses if the social pressure to present one's self in a given way led to repression (in Freudian terms) or role-conflict (in behaviourist terms), in the light of which the appeal of such theorisations of the lifecycle of the self for the comprehension of the existential problems faced by slaves becomes clear.

Foremost in bringing psychohistory to the history of the slave personality was of course Stanley Elkins, who famously utilised Harry Stack Sullivan's version of interpersonal theory in his construction of the 'Sambo', arguing that in the absence of African cultural forms, and in the "closed system" of North American slavery (in contrast to the "open systems" by which he typified other American slave societies)

⁸ For summaries and explanations of Freud's theories of personality and those of the behaviourists I have relied primarily upon Anthony Elliot, *Concepts of The Self*, (Cambridge, 2001), 49-77, 23-45 and Fred Weinstein, 'Psychohistory and the Crisis of the Social Sciences', *H&T*, XXXIV.4, (1995), 299-319. See also, King, 'Domination', 2-6; Robert Hogan, 'What Is Personality Psychology?', in Commentaries, *Psychological Inquiry*, IX.2, (1998), 152-153; Dan McAdams, 'Personality, Modernity, and the Storied Self: A Contemporary Framework for Studying Persons', *Psychological Inquiry*, VII.4, (1996), 295-321; Michel de Certeau, *The Writing Of History*, Tom Conley (trans./ed.), (New York, 1988), 287-307; Thomas A. Kohut, 'Psychohistory as History', *AHR*, XCI.2, (1986), 336-354; Vincent Franklin, 'Slavery, Personality, and Black Culture: Some Theoretical Issues', *Phylon*, XXXV.1, (1974), 54-63.

the only “significant other” from whom the slave could learn the elements of selfhood was the master.⁹ Frederickson and Lasch in their turn, made use of an alternative behaviourist formulation offered by Erving Goffman and so deployed interpersonal and role theory in way that offered a broader range of models than merely the ‘Sambo’ as well as downplaying the “significant other” argument, though they nonetheless insisted that the slave personality was primarily the product of the institution of slavery.¹⁰ In challenging such theses, historians such as Blassingame and Genovese turned to yet other formulations, with the former proffering a version of role theory culled from the work of Ichheiser, while the latter, though he had a preference for Freud and Jung and critiqued Elkins *et al.* for eschewing them, nonetheless also reflected the concerns of the interpersonal theorists in citing slaves’ religion as a crucial socio-cultural reference point, essentially proposing that it

⁹ Though primarily influenced by the work of behaviourist George Herbert Mead whose *Mind, Self and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*, (Chicago, 1934) intuitively argued that it is in interactions between people and their symbolic representations that individual identity is formed, Harry Stack Sullivan’s concept of the “significant other,” which he explained in *Conceptions of Modern Psychiatry* (New York, 1953), was also shaped by Freudian Oedipal theory which considers that the individual’s self-concept is formed in childhood as a response to a strong masculine influence. For Elkins’ deployment of Sullivan see *Slavery*, 119-23.

¹⁰ Erving Goffman, *Asylum: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*, (Garden City, 1961), cited in Frederickson, Lasch, ‘Resistance’, 230-231. Goffman, like Sullivan, was a social behaviourist who had been significantly influenced by Mead, and thought of social development in terms of symbolic interactions, thus assigning role-playing central importance in the process of shaping the self. Such theories were also pivotal in Gresham Sykes’ theorization of the range of possible roles available to the inmate of the total institution in *The Society of Captives: The Study of a Maximum Security Prison*, (Princeton, 1958) and to Donald Clemmer’s argument that captivity predicated against the formation of community, the central theme of his monograph, *The Prison Community*, (New York, 1958), two texts also extensively cited by Frederickson and Lasch [230-238, *passim*]. It was thus in a synthesis of the arguments of Goffman, Sykes and Clemmer, that Frederickson and Lasch found what they considered to be viable psychological model of the slave which unfortunately led them to make an explicit analogy between the slave personality and the personalities of “lower class mental patients who have lived all their previous lives in orphanages, reformatories or jails.” Perhaps they did not mean this to sound quite the way it came out however, and they went on to argue that in fact slaves born to slavery quickly learnt to be “master-opportunists” and became, not ‘Sambos,’ but instead “virtuosos of the system, neither docile nor rebellious, [spending]... their lives in a skilful and somewhat cynical attempt to beat the system at its own game” [233-234].

provided a black source of significant others and role models.¹¹ Yet other behaviourists influenced Kenneth Stampf (who was also disappointed by Elkins' dismissal of Freud and apparent ignorance of the neo-Freudian champion of psychohistory, Erik Erikson), in reaching the conclusion that for many slaves the conflict between their socially determined role and their self-concept would have resulted in a state of perpetual role conflict, leading him to suggest that "those who study slave personality would be well advised to watch for signs of character disorders in these seemingly gay dissemblers."¹²

¹¹ Gustav Ichheiser, *Appearances and Realities*, (San Francisco, 1970), cited in Blassingame, *Community*, 226. Although Ichheiser's ideas on social interactions and the way in which they shape behaviour were based not on the symbolic interactionism of the American social behaviourist school of social psychology but rather stemmed from the Austrian phenomenological tradition, it is worth noting that the similarities between his ideas and work of Erving Goffman led one reviewer to suggest that *Appearances and Realities* had utilized Goffman's ideas without citation, an accusation of plagiarism which was in fact unfounded. See Floyd Rudmin, Rüdiger M. Trimpp, Ilona-Patricia Kryl and Pawel Boski, 'Gustav Ichheiser in the history of social psychology: An early phenomenology of social attribution', *British Journal of Social Psychology* 26, (1987), 165-180, which also reveals the inaccuracies of J. Lofland's 1971 review of *Appearances and Realities*, which appeared in *Social Casework*, 52, (1971), 111. Eugene Genovese's initial response to Elkins' argument, 'Rebelliousness and Docility in the Negro Slave: A Critique of the Elkins Thesis', *Civil War History*, XIII.4, (1967), 293-314, asserted that 'Sambo' was in fact none other than the "slavish personality" of the majority of enslaved peoples throughout history and across continents, whilst also citing Freud as an essential guide to the relationship between subordinates and father figures – significant others. This was a view which in time he moderated and developed – though he remained committed to Freud and Jung – stressing instead the importance of "cultural order" and "material conditions" to the creation of identity, as he argued in 'Toward a Psychology of Slavery: An Assessment of the Contribution of *The Slave Community*', in Al-Tony Gilmore (ed.), *Revisiting Blassingame's Slave Community: The Scholars Respond*, (Westport, 1978), 27-41, while Jordan asserted the significance of slave culture and society as a significant counterbalancing force to the socio-cultural power of the master to shape the slaves' sense of self.

¹² Stampf, 'Rebels', 388-392, *passim*. Stampf was notably a reluctant psychohistorian, as he made apparent by highlighting his lack of confidence when it came to choosing between competing personality theories. However, a peculiarity of his text (which cites Calvin S. Hall and Gardner Lindzey as having identified as many as fifty alternative psychological definitions of personality), is that though he asserted that historians are simply unqualified to assess the competing claims of different psychologists, he nonetheless felt able to conclude that many slaves probably suffered from "role conflict" – a diagnostic term utilized by behaviourists to describe the conflicted psychological state that a patient suffers as they attempt to resolve multiple incongruous and antipathetic roles. Moreover, his assertion that this condition imposed significant "psychic strains" on their "personalities" was a surprising diagnosis given that he also felt unable to choose between David McClelland's view of role psychology, which suggests that the roles an individual plays form an

As Stamppp's comments make clear then, by the 1970s the intertwined questions of dissembling and personality had become the objects of psychohistorical inquiry, but before moving on to examine why this particular historiographical turn helps position our understanding of why slaves' letters did not become the reference for the psychohistorian, it is worth briefly comparing Stamppp's conclusions on the problem that such constant practices of deceit may have posed for the slaves' self-concepts with those offered by Genovese, Blassingame and Gerald Mullin since all four turn to similar sources in their analyses, namely runaway notices posted by masters, and although they come to contradictory conclusions, their differential portrayals of the relationship between self-concept, role-playing and personality are revealing of some of the problems and underlying assumptions that shaped the broader historiographical trend. In particular they all focus upon a common feature of these advertisements which are that they frequently cite speech impediments – hesitancy, mumbling, stuttering – as characteristics by which the fugitives could be recognized but which these historians treat as visible manifestations of psychopathologies, symptoms which they are thus keen to diagnose.¹³

Stamppp, for instance, first refers to these instances of stuttering and stammering some years before his critical engagement with Elkins led him to psychohistoricize them, but his suggestion that they were indicative of “a distressing relationship between the two races, a relationship that must have been for the slaves an emotional nightmare” nonetheless speaks to similar concerns.¹⁴ When he returned to this subject in ‘Rebels and Sambos,’ however his tone was distinctly more

essential part of their personality, and Ralph Linton's, who argues instead that role-playing testifies to nothing more than the individual's ability to learn. Calvin S. Hall, Gardner Lindzey, *Theories of Personality*, (New York, 1957), 7-10; David McClelland, *Personality*, (New York, 1953; 1951), 296; Ralph Linton, *The Cultural Background of Personality*, (New York, 1945), 26, cited in Stamppp, ‘Rebels’, 378 n29-31. For his references to Freud and Erikson see 378 n29.

¹³ Stamppp, *Institution*, 361-362; ‘Rebels’, 391-392; Mullin, *Flight*, 39-123, *passim*; Blassingame, *Community*, 201-204; Genovese, *Jordan*, 647.

¹⁴ Stamppp, *Institution*, 361-362.

diagnostic, which is revealing of just how significant psychohistory had become in the intervening years:

I want to point once again, as I did in *The Peculiar Institution*, to the astonishing frequency of speech problems among slaves.... Dr. Murray Snyder of the Speech Rehabilitation Institute of New York City believes that "Underneath the cloak of inhibition and mild manner the stutterer often seethes with anger." In the case of slaves, speech problems may also have been a manifestation of role conflict or of incompatibility between self and role.¹⁵

This diagnostic tone is similar to that taken by Gerald Mullin in *Flight and Rebellion*, a text which deals with an earlier period but nonetheless offers insights which do not appear to be particularly contingent on time and place but instead, if they could be proved to be accurate, would seem to be applicable to "bicultural" slaves and "marginal men" no matter the location or period under discussion; at the very least it affords a further insight into the mind of the psychohistorian.¹⁶ Out of a total sample of 1,138 fugitive men advertised for in Virginian newspapers published in Williamsburg, Richmond, and Fredericksburg over the period 1736-1801, Mullin found that forty-nine were described by their masters as having some kind of speech impediment. Thus, by using the remaining 1,085 as a control group he proceeded to analyze what distinguished this smaller group of stutterers from the rest, and demonstrated that a larger proportion of them were of 'mixed race' than in the

¹⁵ Stamp, 'Rebels', 391-392.

¹⁶ Gerald W. Mullin, *Flight*, 39-123, *passim*. While "marginal" slaves were surely to be found anytime and anywhere where masters 'privileged' some slaves over others – for it is in the ambiguity that this created in such bondspeople's relationships with both their fellows and their owners that Mullin finds their marginality – with regards to the "bicultural" the argument is a little more complex. Given that Mullin's analysis identified the differential effects impact of the process of acculturation on different slaves, some of whom became at least partially assimilated into the socio-cultural milieu (the "bicultural"), others of whom either stubbornly resisted acculturation or else lived in slave communities which were so frequently replenished with new African imports that the process of acculturation was slowed, this would seem to be a categorization that is relevant only in areas where slave importation was still the primary source of new hands. Nonetheless, it is also useful to consider how "marginal" slaves may also have *become* "bicultural" in that where masters promoted individual slaves they often gave them cultural symbols of differentiation – better clothes, housing and supplies, a horse, a whip – and such badges of authority were surely also potentially badges of cultural intermixture that did more than merely emphasize the marginalization of the slave so 'privileged'; they also demonstrated that they were now at a cultural remove from the slave community and a little closer to the culture of the slave master.

overall group, while where their skills were recorded they were generally more skilled than the rest of the group, although not so highly skilled that they would have been hired out and so experienced a measure of independence and freedom from surveillance. They were thus representative, Mullin suggested, of a group of slaves who occupied the peculiar hinterland of the “bicultural,” “marginal” slave – culturally compromised and isolated, high status and quasi-free but forever unsure of where the exact boundary lay, whose equivocal relationship vis-à-vis other slaves meant that they would always feel partially alienated yet whose ambiguous relationship with their masters meant that they were constantly on their guard:

It is [thus] useful to ask what the fugitives communicative problems revealed about their self-view. In personality theory the point is often made that the ultimate determinant of behavior – at the very core – is the self-image or self-concept. What took place in the stutterer’s head... is difficult to say. We may hazard however that while these bicultural slaves were less oppressed, their masters’ treatment was ambiguous; and their problems began at this point. The very jobs that brought incalculable psychological protections against the abuses of slavery, also sensitized the slaves to what they really were: marginal men, often light skinned, who enjoyed quasi-free status that was only tenuously sustained by skills, performances, attitudes, and most importantly by constant vigilance over feelings the discovery of which would jeopardize the slaves’ positions and possibly their lives. These men were also acutely aware of their inability to punish directly “the man” who held power; and “the man” with whom they were forced to deal directly as “privileged” slaves. This group’s elite status did little to assuage the galling, painful impress of slavery; in fact, it intensified it. Above all these men were burdened by fear. They were fearful and watchful, especially before their masters.¹⁷

In identifying speech impediments as a peculiarity of “marginal men” and the “bicultural,” then, Mullin effectively proposes a class based interpretation of the

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 98-102. Like Elkins, Frederickson and Lasch, Stamp and others, Mullin’s choices of specific psychoanalytical and sociological texts are telling, and in the footnotes to these comments he cites two works by sociologists associated with the behaviourist and symbolic interactionist schools, Robert Ezra Park, *Race and Culture*, (New York, 1950), [187 n47], and John W. Kinch, ‘A Formalized Theory of the Self-Concept’, *American Journal of Sociology*, LXVIII.4, (1963), 481-486, [186 n46], while his reference to Erik Erikson’s ‘The Concept of Identity in Race Relations: Notes and Queries’, *Daedalus*, (1966), 145-71, [*loc. cit.*] emphasizes the influence of neo-Freudian psychohistory. Moreover, Mullin authorizes his diagnostic approach in similar ways to Stamp, citing texts by psychologists and speech therapists to back up his conclusions: Dominick A. Barbara, *Stuttering: A Psychodynamic Approach to its Understanding and Treatment*, (London, 1958); L. E. Travis (ed.), *Handbook of Speech Pathology*, (London, 1957); Charles F. Diehl, *A Compendium of Research and Theory on Stuttering*, (Springfield 1958), all cited 186 n45.

stuttering slave phenomenon which is potentially very relevant to the slaves' letters, so many of which were written by slaves who occupied a similar marginal position.

Blassingame's analysis of the evidence of speech impediments was different again, and it is interesting not only because it is an almost complete inversion of the diagnoses offered by Mullin and Stampp, but also because he was a vital player in the process by which slave testimony came to be so highly valued. It is therefore particularly useful to understand his perspective on the psychopathology of the slave. Unsurprisingly, given his evidential preferences, he introduces his analysis of the white testimony of the advertisements in a somewhat dismissive manner, reminding his readers that "the major thing to remember about these notices is that they contained information which could help distinguish the fugitive from the mass of slaves. Most of the fugitives had no readily identifiable behavioural patterns which set them apart from their fellows." This aside, what is particularly striking about Blassingame's approach is that he does not duck the problem of 'Sambo' but instead argues that he was typified by just the kinds of character traits attributed to the slave stutterer: "The fugitive Sambo often stuttered, whined, laughed, grinned, trembled, was 'easily frightened or scared,' 'rather stupid,' 'addicted to lying,' or had a 'sly,' 'down guilty' look, or 'shuffled' and had a 'low voice,' or 'a small impediment in speech when frightened in the presence of whites.'" Then, despite suggesting that such stutterers are in any case a statistically irrelevant group (an argument he bases on his own statistical analysis of the frequency of advertisements which refer to speech impediments of which he finds only 19 out of the 163 notices that appeared in three New Orleans newspapers in the twenty one years between 1839 and 1860) he goes on to discuss what else these stuttering 'Sambos' had in common and comes up with the following rather telling insight:

Frequently, in the same sentence in which the Sambo traits cited above appeared, the planters observed that the slave was artful, could read and write, and had probably forged a pass, and stolen money, horses, and clothes...

The fugitive Sambo was a bundle of contradictions. On the one hand, he was the epitome of loyalty and docility, and completely trusted by his master. On the other, in spite of his "loyalty," he ran away.¹⁸

Thus if 'Sambo' was little more than the inscrutable dissembler's mask, then his "peculiarities of speech" testified less to psychological problems than to poor performance, for where a good dissembler learned to play their role without stumbling over their lines, the less expert may perhaps have suffered not from "role-conflict" but from stage-fright; one might even speculate that at least some of the stuttering 'Sambos' were not giving a poor performance but a superlative one – how better to dupe your master than to convince him of your idiocy?

Finally, then, to Genovese who, citing both Mullin and Stamp, ¹⁹ argues that those who have interpreted the slave stutterer as revealing that slaves lived in almost constant "anxiety and fear" may have completely missed the point, or at the very least misunderstood how fear and anxiety might affect the mental state of the slave, and his analysis bears repeating here, not least because his preference for Freudian readings of the evidence is apparent:

The stuttering, stammering, and downcast looks before white men betrayed not only fear but smoldering anger and resentment. Their recurrence among runaways also lends support to recent theories that associate stuttering with a sense of isolation, with fathers vague or distant, with domineering mothers, and with an inability to cope with authority. Recent psychological researches cannot be projected back in an attempt to construct a depth psychology of strangers long since dead. But these researches do conform in a general way to a perception of slaves as seething with hostility toward those who commanded the paternalistic relationship in which they found themselves embedded, especially when authority manifested itself in ways that must have seemed arbitrary, capricious, insensitive and brutal.²⁰

By the 1970s, then, the slave stutterer had been fairly carefully delineated by his status and his class (and I would emphasize that in every case Stamp, Mullin, Blassingame, and Genovese discussed, they referred to male slaves), and diagnosed as suffering either from a profound case of role-conflict, perhaps induced by the

¹⁸ Blassingame, *Community*, 201-204.

¹⁹ Mullin, *Flight*, 98-103, and Stamp, *Institution*, 381, in Genovese, *Jordan*, 797 n51.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 647.

insecurity and ambiguity of their interpersonal relationships, or else as a more or less effective and untroubled dissembler who might nonetheless be concealing a seething resentment toward father figures and his overbearing mother. Aside from the problems these differential diagnoses highlight for the historian interested in examining the personality of the slave, however, what is significant about them is that whichever particular diagnosis one finds the most convincing (a choice that is of course a product of one's preconceptions about the slave psyche, and one's limited knowledge of and ability to choose between various behavioural and psychoanalytical models), the prevalence of such analyses must have profound implications for the ways in which black testimony can be read, for while it may not discredit the Narratives and WPA interviews since they represent recollections by former slaves who had had the opportunity to partially remake themselves outwith the institution and thus rid themselves of at least some aspects of their institutionalized personalities, it surely problematises the slave letters. Moreover, such an analytical framework brings to mind Bailey's suggestion that one should be wary of assuming "that men and women speaking about themselves are necessarily the most important and valuable sources,"²¹ for as a statement this is a perfect fit to the psychohistorical mode of thought; if the historian is to play psychoanalyst to the dissembling slave, then surely the last thing s/he can rely upon is anything such a slave would say, especially when they were writing to a master or other white authority.

But we should also keep in mind Michel de Certeau's argument that what distinguishes the treatment of the (mute) artefact from the (vocal) text within the historiographical hierarchy of knowledge is whether they are analysed on the one hand via "sociological" means, or on the other in "ideological" and "literary" terms, the former typifying objectification, the latter acknowledging the subjectivity and agency of the historical actor, a paradigm that well encapsulates the differential

²¹ Bailey, 'A Divided Prism', 383.

treatment that slaves' letters as opposed to ex-slaves' testimonies have received.²² Indeed, scepticism toward the validity of slaves' self-representations reflects the construction of bondspeople themselves as the objects of historical study since it designates their letters as artefacts but not as texts, interesting insofar as they throw light upon the ways in which literacy was utilised within the institution of slavery, but not as testaments to the ways in which slaves sought to construct themselves.

This is a problem that is further explored below in Part Three in the context of an analysis of how we might productively engage with these documents without reducing them to mere artefactual traces of the past, but it is worth considering in terms of the present analysis because it appears to go against the very principles that motivated the revisionists to utilize black sources, namely to replace such objectifications of the slave with an acknowledgement of their agency and subjectivity. Moreover, since folklore, interviews and Narratives have all been accorded literary and ideological notice (although this is not to say they have not at the same time been treated sociologically and anthropologically as artefacts) it might perhaps seem surprising that I should suggest that bondspeople remained historiographically objectified since the precise point of such analytical strategies was to allow the slaves to 'speak for themselves.'²³ And yet, of course, there are no slave voices in the Narratives, nor in the WPA interviews, nor in the folklore, only those of former slaves whose subjectivity may be quantified and qualified by thorough personal contextualization and close analysis of the circumstances in which

²² de Certeau, *History*, 118.

²³ For a discussion of the sociological/artefactual treatment of the Slave Narratives see, for example Lindon Barrett, 'African-American Slave Narratives', 415-418, where he presents a persuasive case for reading much of the historico-literary tradition that surrounds the analysis of the Slave Narratives as evidence in these terms, proposing that as studies of these texts focussed more and more intensively on the "social and historical conditions of their production and peculiarities of plot construction, as well as their nineteenth-century readership and popularity" resulted in the emergence of a "consensus among African-American literary critics for the 1980s.... [that] the status of the slave narrative as a reliable redaction of matters beyond its text was bracketed in deference to considering the text as an artifact open to investigation itself."

their testimony was recorded: unreliable witnesses to the object of slavery-past they may be, but at least we have means to measure their unreliability. Slaves' letters, on the other hand, are often difficult to contextualize, their writers' circumstances obscure, and the extent of their dissembling impossible to discern, and thus while they may seem to tell us a great deal about the subject of slavery-present we have no way of assessing how reliably they reflect their authors' genuine feelings, self-perceptions or personalities. In short, I would suggest that ex-slave testimony and African American folklore is itself engaged in the objectification of the slave-self-past, and yet by occupying this equivocal position offers the historian a view of the slave experience that seems crisper, clearer and less ambiguous than that afforded by the slippery, dissembling textual selves presented by slaves who were subjectively experiencing slavery as their present, especially if one begins one's analysis by assuming that such slaves cannot bear accurate witness since they were likely suffering the psychological ill-effects of role-conflict or lack of role-clarity, social marginalization or bicultural alienation.

Nonetheless, it was into this complex and contradictory psychohistorical and historiographical milieu that the editors of the three major collections of slave letters, Blassingame, Starobin and Miller, published their anthologies, and it is thus worth considering just how they framed their publications, for what becomes apparent is that precisely the same concerns over issues of role playing, role conflict, marginality and dissembling that inflected the interpretation of stuttering also influenced the presentation, and perhaps too the reception, of the slaves' letters. Blassingame's *Slave Testimony*, for instance (the cover of which, it will be remembered, was graced with the epigram "If we want to know *the hearts and secret thoughts* of slaves, we must study the testimony of blacks," [emphasis added] which makes very clear the psychohistorical value he accords slave testimony) offers the following assessment of their importance which, in lauding the letters exchanged between slaves also clarifies why other letters written by slaves are not to be trusted:

Undoubtedly the best source of slave testimony comprises the letters written by blacks to the members of their families while still enslaved. There is no false modesty for the eyes of masters or bravado to impress white abolitionists. Instead, these letters represent

a baring of the soul intended only for the eyes of loved ones. The conscious efforts to deceive which sometimes appear in other sources are largely missing in these records. The ubiquitous white man had nothing to do with either creating or preserving them. In them mothers cry for the children separated from them and fugitives agonize over loved ones left in bondage. No source brings the historian so directly in touch with the slave, for with them he does not have to wrestle with the faulty memory of the autobiographer or the biases of editors and interviewers.²⁴

To highlight the negative points he is making about the majority of the slave letters then, the problems are that they are frequently deceitful, full of “false modesty” and/or “bravado,” do not entail the “baring of the soul,” and the “ubiquitous white man” was involved not only in their creation but also their preservation. Nor is his dismissal of the other letters limited to this negative statement, as elsewhere in this introduction he argues that “the black correspondents are mostly limited to those who were relatively satisfied with their status, identified with their masters’ interests, and considered their masters kindhearted men” and concludes, therefore, that “both the slaves [who wrote letters] and the masters [who permitted their slaves to correspond with them] were exceptional men and women.”²⁵ Little wonder, then, if the project is to “to know the hearts and secret thoughts of slaves” that aside from slave-to-slave correspondence such texts should largely be left to one side and indeed they are conspicuous by their absence from *The Slave Community*, and whilst it may well be that this could be explained merely in terms of Blassingame’s professional progress,

²⁴ *ST*, lxiv. It is also worth noting that almost every statement in this passage needs to be qualified since the majority of these letters (which make up but a fraction of the archive in any case) were liable to pass through masters’ hands, since they frequently read and/or wrote for illiterate slaves, whilst also acting as postmasters for even those that could write. As to letters back from fugitives, these are not only a rarity but were also put to use by abolitionists as exemplars of the trials and tribulations of slaves, and hence again should be read as containing precisely the elements Blassingame asserts that they lack. With regard to his assertion that the “ubiquitous white” played no part in the act of preservation, this too is doubtful, for aside from the few letters that were published by former slaves in their narratives (correspondence which must surely be regarded as affected by the self-same autobiographical and editorial processes which influenced the texts that contain them), the majority of slave letters of all types (including those between slaves), that have ended up being entered into archives were preserved by masters and are to be found in collections of plantation papers, a factor that profoundly complicates the idea that these documents are in some way are repositories of unguarded, unsullied truths about slavery.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, lxiii.

given that *Slave Testimony* was published some five years after *The Slave Community*, it is notable that even in the revised and expanded edition of 1979, he does not cite a single slave letter.

Nor is Blassingame alone in damning the slaves' letters with faint praise, for in Starobin's work on the letters one finds him arguing that the "few letters written by ordinary slaves... must be used intensively," because the majority of slave-authored and dictated letters were far too exceptional to be used to study the lives of "ordinary" slaves since they testified only to the experiences of the

privileged bondsmen, those house servants, drivers and artisans who made up an elite group of perhaps 5 or 10 percent of the total slave population. These slaves lived in the cities or in the 'big house' of the largest plantations, in environments which were not representative of the average slave's milieu. They were not only beholden to whites for their special status, but – unlike field hands who might find succor in the anonymity of the slave quarter – were usually under constant white supervision.

And Starobin's critique went further than this, for not only did he regard this elite as a potentially colonized class (a view which is of course reminiscent of Mullin's view of them as "bicultural" and/or "marginal") who had effectively become the very lackeys their masters expected them to be, but he also regarded the vast majority of letters as a particularly problematic set of sources, and while his analysis of their limitations is perceptive, it also serves to illustrate how easily they might be dismissed as far too dissembling and deceitful to be relied upon:

Since slaves were writing to whites or were aware that whites might intercept letters to blacks [or relied upon white amanuenses... who may have affected the expression of the slave author and placed the black under subtle forms of duress] not all portions of the letters are to be accepted literally. Slaves were conscious of the need to deceive for purposes of survival, not only when they communicated with each other, but also – especially – when they addressed their masters. Thus the letters must be read with extreme care, for they are loaded with subtleties of meaning, double entendres, and outright put-ons.²⁶

Yet underlying this careful and considered introduction to *Blacks in Bondage* is, I think, a deeper problem that is apparent when one considers the overall structure

²⁶ *BIB*, xx.

of the text in which Starobin deploys the hundred or so letters he utilizes to construct a sort of narrative. This moves from an examination of the way in which the “Black Elite” reported to their masters, to an examination of letters that describe “Protest, Escape and Rebellion,” and thence to the correspondence of slaves and former slaves seeking to go “Back to Africa” and concludes with a section which features a selection of letters from the émigrés, “Letters from Liberia.” Effectively therefore, if one reads the narrative thrust of this arrangement as signifying a movement from slavery to freedom, by placing the letters of the “elite” at the greatest textual remove from this ultimate freedom he seems to be suggesting that these slaves, the most prolific contributors to the archive of slaves’ letters, were also at the greatest psychological remove from mental liberation and thus that as the most deeply enmeshed in the slave system, at least a number of them were in some way betraying their ‘race’, caste or class.²⁷

If for Blassingame the majority of the slave letter writers were dissemblers, and for Starobin they were the mentally colonized, it is perhaps Randall Miller who displays the greatest confidence in the broader utility of the letters he utilizes, or at least this is what seems apparent from the structure of “*Dear Master*.” This moves back and forth from general discussions of issues such as slaves’ and masters’ different senses of piety and spirituality, the role of drivers and their relationships to overseers and other slaves, the trials and tribulations of the Liberian émigrés and their colony, or the complex relationships between masters and slaves, to the specific examples of the letters John Hartwell Cocke received from various members of the Skipwith family. It thus seems to imply that what can be read in the specifics of Lucy or George Skipwith’s letters may be applied to the generality of slave experience.

²⁷ It is notable that his implication that ultimate freedom is to be found not on American soil but in Africa is made explicit in the introduction to Chapter Eight of *Blacks in Bondage* which is entitled ‘Back to Africa’ and opens with the statement that “Slaves struggled to return to their African homeland from the moment they were forced to leave African shores.” *Ibid.*, 159.

Nor is he so concerned by their dissembling, though it is frequently revealed in the contrast between the slaves' portrayals of events and other sources, including John Hartwell Cocke's diary entries which record his distinct disappointment at finding that what he had been told in correspondence turned out to be somewhat different from the reality. Nor indeed does Miller seem particularly interested in or perturbed by the possibility that the slaves are mentally colonized, psychologically damaged or suffering from any particular confusion about their roles – in his telling they know their parts and they play them. And yet, despite all of this, in his introduction he reveals other reservations about making too much of the letters, which speak to rather different concerns:

The Skipwith slave letters are seemingly of limited utility in enabling us fully to comprehend the nuances of slave life and culture. Letters were not a common form of expression among enslaved Afro-Americans, or among freedmen for that matter. Most slaves were illiterate people who relied upon the spoken word to convey the full compass of their emotions and thoughts. The written word cannot fully catch the flavor of the call and response, double entendre, gesture, and rhythms of oral communication. But the Skipwith letters offer rare, if sometimes tantalizingly brief, glimpses into the lives of particular slaves and freedmen over two generations.²⁸

At best, then, the slave letter could not compare to the ex-slave voice since literacy, and letter writing, was exceptional. At worst it did not compare because the slave letter writer was a member of the elite, a dissembler or perhaps even a psychological cripple, and if this was the most that the champions of the slaves' letters could say for them it is perhaps unsurprising that they have not enjoyed the kind of historical and literary interest that has been accorded to ex-slave testimony.²⁹ The letters, after all, rarely represent the sort of defiance and resistance that those that sought to challenge the 'Sambo' myth wanted to find, while when the post-Elkins storm died down and the psychohistorical trend passed so documents that

²⁸ *DMLSF*, 14.

²⁹ Cf. *MON*, *passim*. Though writing more than forty years earlier than Miller, Blassingame and Starobin, Woodson nonetheless seems far more confident of the value of the letters than any of them, and while the slaves' letters he presented may be limited primarily to those that were sent to the ACS, he nonetheless attempted to make them speak to larger issues.

appeared to show the slave as cooperative collaborators (as do many of the slave letters, at least on the face of it) became easy to dismiss as mere role-playing but of little interest beyond this. Far better to ignore these difficult documents and focus instead on deconstructing the master narrative via folklore and spirituals, Narratives and interviews, all of which appeared to offer a far more transparent account of slave culture as a source of personal, familial and community strength.³⁰

And yet the slaves' letters do not in fact deny these possibilities, though they do complicate our understandings of them, while they also require a methodology that is not predicated on the psychohistorical reconstruction of the tensions between personality and self but instead considers these "egodocuments" as contingent and context-specific representations of the self.³¹ Such an approach acknowledges that such public self-constructions would have existed in what must oftentimes have been a difficult and stressful tension with interior self-knowledge, but it does not presume to psychoanalyze, offering instead a textual/contextual analysis which suggests that a consideration of the complex relationships between these self-representations and their usages and purposes can provide significant insights into how slaves wanted to present their personalities to a range of different others, both black and white, and thus some intimations at least of how they perceived and constructed their audience.

³⁰ Of course some of the letters – the ones which Blassingame and Starobin insisted should be heavily utilized – do attest to these issues, but with a few notable exceptions even these have not enjoyed the attention that they deserve.

³¹ The term 'egodocument' was coined by Dutch historian Jacques Presser to describe materials written in the first person singular, such as diaries, autobiographies, and travel journals, but which has been expanded upon and developed by feminist historians such as Mineke Bosch and Nancy K. Miller to describe a wide variety of documents in which women write of themselves as subjects. My use of it is thus a further adaptation, since rather than writing of themselves as subjects (although many slave letter writers did do this) I am drawing attention to the way in which slaves' letters construct the subjectivity – the 'ego' – of the writer, in which context the term is useful since it has the advantage of making plain that the creation of such documents entails writing the self into existence. Jacques Presser, *Uit het Werk van Dr. J. Prosser*, M. C. Brands (ed.), (Amsterdam, 1979), in Suzanne Fleischman, 'Gender, the Personal, and the Voice of Scholarship: A Viewpoint', *Signs*, XXIII.4, (1998), 995 n32. See also, Mineke Bosch, 'A Woman's Life in a Soapbox', *History Workshop*, 24, (1987), 166-70; Nancy K. Miller, 'Getting Personal: Autobiography as Cultural Criticism', in *eadem*, *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical Acts*, (New York, 1991), 24.

This should not, however, be read as a return to a methodology based on the slave-as-dissembler thesis, at least not in the sense of attempting to reconstruct the slave that lies behind the dissembler. Rather my intention is to analyse the practice of deception somewhat differently and consider not what the dissembler seeks to conceal but that which they seek to display. In a sense this is an adaptation of the methodology suggested by James Scott, and indeed reading the letters with Scott's *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* in mind one is of course led to conclude that such representations of 'self' are merely "masks" shaped by "prudence, fear and the desire to curry favour," "public transcripts" performed to satisfy the requirements of the dominant class, which bear little or no resemblance to the "hidden transcript" that is only revealed "offstage."³² Perhaps so, but if Scott is encouraging us to attempt to peer behind the mask I would suggest that we will rarely get to do so and thus would do better to interpret the performance at face value and to deconstruct it as a performance than attempt to reconstruct its 'reality'.

The primary reason for reading the letters in this way is that I think that it is important to recognize that the tension between "domination" and "resistance" that Scott refers to is just that – a tension. Defiance and its private, covert expression may well lie concealed behind the masks of conformity, accommodation and subservience that seem to typify the "public transcripts" of the majority of slave letters, but these "hidden," or more appropriately marginal transcripts of resistance do not nullify the public expressions of domination so much as revealing them as conditional performances where content and meaning should be understood as responses to both context and subtext, an idea that also works in reverse; just as the mask of subservience may be worn to conceal a defiant and resistant self in the face of domination, it is equally convincing to argue that the defiance and resistance toward the master that slaves frequently displayed to each other (and ex-slaves demonstrated

³² Scott, *Domination*, 2-5, *passim*.

to their readers and/or interviewers) could themselves be used to re-inscribe acts of subordination with meanings of resistance.³³ What I suggest, therefore, is that approaching these texts as performance pieces and recognizing that the actors are masked is an appropriate metaphor so long as we acknowledge that as historians we do not in fact possess back-stage passes. The mask we can see is therefore merely one of many that are interchangeable but not removable: there is no such thing as getting behind the mask, or revealing the “hidden transcript;” there is, however, the possibility of seeing an alternate mask and exploring the ambiguous marginalia that problematize the “public transcript.” Thus, when I speak of the slaves’ letters as performance pieces I mean to emphasize not so much the artificiality (or indeed the verisimilitude) of their stagecraft as to suggest that there is a need for us to suspend our disbelief when reading them: instead of trying to see the actors behind the masks, we should critique their performance.

This analysis, however, comes with two qualifications. The first is that while recognizing that all we can see is the performance, we must nonetheless acknowledge that there is an essential difference between representations of self – the masks that we wear in our interactions with others – and our actual sense of self – the face that we know ourselves. Thus when I talk about a slave’s ‘interior self,’ ‘personality’ or ‘sense of self’ I am referring to things inaccessible, yet which we know exist, whereas when I discuss their ‘construction,’ ‘representation’ or ‘performance’ of ‘self,’ I am talking about the mask presented in any given epistolary transaction which is something to which we have access but which we

³³ While I admire Scott’s analysis of the “arts of resistance” I use the concept of *marginal transcripts* to differentiate this approach his idea of the *hidden transcript* because I think the idea that the historian or literary theorist unearths the ‘hidden’ is problematic in that it relies too much upon our agency as literary archaeologists and thus at best renders our analyses as brilliant insights, but at worst renders resistance virtually unrecoverable. To consider them as ‘marginal’, however, recognizes that they are “arts of resistance” but better suggests the idea that expressions of resistance are necessarily coded and slippery, at play in marginal and ambiguous realms of performance and thus that seeing them is contingent on a certain hermeneutic positioning rather than on the individual brilliance of the researcher.

must also accept is partial, contingent, and, that in all probability, involves a level of “dissembling.” The second qualification is that in utilizing the performance metaphor I wish to avoid the implication of a simple duality between onstage and offstage, mask and face, and instead would suggest that we consider representations of the self not in terms of this implied duality but in terms of hybridity.³⁴ What I mean by this is that in fact we put on many different masks in different situations while even the mask worn for one set of interactions, such as a slave’s regular epistolary communication with their master, changes over time and from specific, contingent situation to specific, contingent situation.

While I do not deny that role-conflict may have led to potentially troubling mental states, therefore, nor that slave dissemblers may have found the masks they were forced to wear uncomfortable or even psychologically damaging, nor indeed that bondspeople may have learned the elements of self-construction from many significant others, including masters, I would suggest that this notion of hybridity offers the possibility of a rather more profitable engagement with the slaves’ personalities (or indeed with any particular historical actors’ self-constructions) than those psychohistorical approaches which seek to excavate their mental states and to explain such symptoms as stuttering in psychopathological terms. Moreover I would suggest that is in fact the only practical approach since as historians all we have access to are representations of the self and while I think it is certainly profitable to explore marginal transcripts, what is hidden from us is just that, hidden. While it may be that stuttering and many other pathological behaviours were the expression of these hidden natures, given that contemporary diagnosticians do not even agree on

³⁴ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (London, 2004; 1994), 277. Bhabha argues that the concept of “hybridity” poses a profound challenge to the definition of “subaltern consciousness as binary, as having positive and negative dimensions. It allows the articulation of subaltern agency to emerge as relocation and reinscription,” thus rejecting the kind of essentialism implied by the idea that the slave (or subaltern) must always be in a particular, predetermined relationship with either power or those, like her, that are subject to power.

the relationships between behavioural symptoms and psychological states it seems presumptuous in the extreme for amateur psychologists (which is all any historian can claim to be) to attempt to read the slaves' interior selves through such public performances.

Before closing this section, then, I would like to present an alternative model of personality and self-construction that conceives of the letters as egodocuments and places them centre stage, for while I may be highly sceptical about the value of psychohistorical analysis, I would nonetheless suggest that in our attempts to comprehend the complex array of social and cultural arrangements that constituted the "fragile bridge across the intolerable contradictions inherent in a society based on racism, slavery, and class exploitation,"³⁵ the need for a theory of personality which can make sense of slaves' (and indeed masters') conceptions and constructions of self and other cannot be overstated. It is in these performances, after all, that one finds much of what made it possible, to albeit limited extents, for slaveowners to depend upon bondspeople, and for bondspeople to rely upon slaveowners. In such relationships there was no doubt dissembling on both sides, each performing roles for the other, indeed a variety of performances for a variety of others, but in examining these self-representations and considering them in the light of contemporary anthropological and philosophical approaches to the understanding of the self and its relationship to the social and cultural structures/realms of performance in which it is formed and/or exists, I hope to demonstrate how an examination of the creation, utilisation, and archivization of slaves' letters can aid and complicate our understanding of the ways in which the brittle allegiances that bound black and white together in racial slavery were mutually maintained but also under constant threat and renegotiation.

³⁵ Genovese, *Jordan*, 5.

Chapter Five

Reading Lucy:

Self-narration, egodocuments and performance for oneself and the other

The identity of the character is comprehensible through the transfer to the character of the operation of emplotment, first applied to the action recounted; characters, we will say, are themselves plots.

Paul Ricoeur, (1992)¹

In a discussion of possible anthropological approaches to the problem of identity construction, Anthony P. Cohen suggests that a potentially enlightening and productive way to investigate selfhood is to undertake what he describes as some “fieldwork on ourselves.” This involves a moment of introspection and a consideration of how each of us is constantly engaged in maintaining what he describes as “curious mixtures of allegiances... some of which are positively antagonistic”:

The issue is not that we belong to many different kinds of group and association, although of course we do. Rather, the curiosity lies in their incompatibility.... We have routinely to juggle the incompatible claims of family and work, of family and friends, of friends and neighbours, of neighbours and co-religionists; of locality and ethnic peers, of ethnic peers and nationality, of nationality and locality, and so on. All of these associations pull us in different directions. It seems remarkable to me that, as individuals, we generally manage to cope with these many incompatible claims on our allegiance without cracking under the strain. It is little short of a triumph that we do so while also preserving a reasonable sense of loyalty to our own sense of self, that is, to our individuality.²

Of course Cohen points out that the drawback of such a commonsense approach is its subjectivity – as he confesses, “I write as a bourgeois British intellectual” – and I do not intend to reduce the complexity and diversity of African American personalities in slavery to comprehensibility simply by universalizing bourgeois liberal values.

¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, Kathleen Blamey (trans.), (Chicago, 1992), 143.

² Anthony Cohen, *Self Consciousness: An Alternative Anthropology of Identity*, (London, 1994), 9-10.

But while I accept, (at least in the generality), David Hackett Fischer's point that people in different "places and times, have not merely thought different things[,]. . . [t]hey have thought them differently,"³ given that Cohen's hypothesis is not universalizing any particular set of allegiances but rather highlights the diverse range of allegiances any single individual could be subject to and the incompatible demands these allegiances must place on their sense of self, I do not think we need to discard it as being inapplicable to African American slaves. Indeed, one might reformulate it as follows:

S/he must routinely juggle the incompatible claims of family and labour, of family and community, of community and masters, of masters and co-religionists; of ethnic peers and the enslaved community, of the enslaved community and the free community, of the free community and of ethnic peers, and so on. All of these associations pull him/her in different directions.

For instance, this diversity of allegiances is clearly revealed in the many letters Lucy Skipwith wrote to John Hartwell Cocke, and as a case study in the complex and contradictory nature of the allegiances that made demands on this slave's self-concept, it is worth examining some of these in detail:

Hopewell[,]. august the 17th 1854⁴

my Dear Master [*John Hartwell Cocke*]

I received your message in mr Singletons letter and was very sorry that I had to be reminded of your orders to me. It is my desire and my determanation to do whatever you commands me to do, and I can do it now with more pleasure than I ever could before, but as I could not give you the sattisfaction that I wish to give you, I refused to write to you atall, but as you have called upon me I will speak the truth to you. I have been trying to carry on Family prayers by the plan laid down by you but som has thought propper to lay down their own prayers at times, and as you did not say this was to be done it makes me feel uneasy, and it was always done unexpecting to me. every man heard your words, and those that do not obey I hope will stand for themselves[.] I tries to do all that I can in this matter. I know that I will be blamed by some of the people for mentioning this to you, but I am bound to speak the truth when I do speak, with the help of God[.] I have just mentioned this matter to mr. Singleton and I hope in the future things will go on Just as you say. I have read from 15th of matthew to the 3rd of Luke since you went away. none of the people have improved enough to read the prayer as yet, but I hope that some will be able to do it before very long[.] my School

³ David Hackett Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies: Toward A Logic of Historical Thought*, (London, 1971), 203-207.

⁴ LS to JHC, 17 November 1854, *DMLSF*, 196-197.

Children that comes to school every day are improveing in learning, but the boys that do not come every day I fear that I shall never be able to do much with them, as it do not lay upon their mines as it ought. give my love to all my friends and tell Birthier to write to me.

I would be very glad to receive a letter from you. I have nothing more to say at this time. I remane your servant

Lucy Skipwith

Of the no doubt manifold antagonistic allegiances to which Lucy is subject, this letter appears to reveal at least four. The first is her allegiance to her master – “it is my desire and my determanation to do whatever you commands me to do” – which can be contrasted with the second, her allegiance to the plantation community – “I know that I will be blamed by some of the people for mentioning this to you” – while a third, her allegiance to herself, is apparent in the way that she distinguishes her good behaviour from her fellow slaves’ misbehaviour – “it was always done unexpecting to me. every man heard your words, and those that do not obey I hope will stand for themselves.” Through it all, however, one can also discern a fourth, namely her overwhelming sense of duty, or allegiance, to God which profoundly complicates this already contradictory and antagonistic web of allegiances: as a God-fearing woman she cannot tell a lie which she would have to do in order to avoid betraying the community, yet as a dutiful slave she must serve her master who demands that she report on her progress. Instead, therefore, she attempts to find an alternative approach (although this ultimately fails), which is to disobey an order – “as I could not give you the sattisfaction that I wish to give you, I refused to write to you atall, but as you have called upon me I will speak the truth to you... I am bound to speak the truth when I do speak, with the help of God.”

Perhaps the most interesting way in which this letter reveals Lucy’s multiple allegiances, the different directions in which they pull her, and how her allegiance to herself shapes her responses, however, are the points at which she either mentions Mr Singleton, the white overseer, or else we can sense his presence. It is after all through his intercession and in response to the threat that it implies that she is shamed/bullied into writing, but at the same time she also invokes his (and thus, indirectly Cocke’s) authority to reinforce her own power – “I have just mentioned

this matter to mr. Singleton and I hope in the future things will go on Just as you say.” Beyond these direct references to Singleton’s presence, however, it is also important to keep in mind that his surveillance remains a constant background threat – God may make her truthful, but the fact that she cannot confidently tell a lie without fear of being caught in it must surely complicate her situation.

It is also worth noting how her responses to each of these allegiances are rooted in an instinct for self-preservation, and each one places demands upon her that are in fact underpinned by some kind of threat or penalty. Most conspicuously there is the fact that her allegiance to her master is secured through force, or at least the threat of force, and this is clearly shown by the fact that she only responds to Cocke’s demands for a letter because he instructs a white overseer to command her to, but one can also see that allegiance to community is enforced, if only by the threat of their disapprobation. As to her duty to herself, the manifestation of her instinct for self-preservation is obvious in her desire to please her master and to avoid displeasing her community, although one can speculate that beyond her fears of either master or community there is also a sense of shame – she herself speaks of her uneasiness – and this is reinforced by her fear of God and the hereafter.

It is thus reasonable to argue that Lucy the slave was, like Anthony the anthropologist, subject to a variety of allegiances that pull her in different directions, but was she, like Anthony, able to “accommodate these plural claims... while also having a strongly developed sense of self” or is this concept too culturally and temporally specific to be applied to an elite slave in Nineteenth-century Alabama? As I have already suggested, I think we can see that at its core her behaviour, and her representation of it to her master, is partially determined by what I have termed an instinct for self-preservation, which is clearly to beg the question as to whether this implies a “strongly developed sense of self.” I think it does, and furthermore that this self can be clearly seen by considering one particularly striking feature of her letters, namely the way in which she determinedly works against any overseer who does not meet her exacting standards, leading a number of them to attempt to limit, censor or

prevent her letter writing.⁵ That they are ever unsuccessful in this, while she on the other hand, appears to be quite successful at both undermining their positions and perhaps even causing them to either quit or be fired is itself an interesting insight into the battles of wills that took place between favoured slaves and suspect overseers, but in the context of a discussion of her sense and representation of self I would suggest that these confrontations reveal a determined, consistent and self-confident individual at work.⁶

⁵ Though Miller does not present an analysis of each of Lucy's letters he provides an excellent overall introduction to her as a character, in this case entitled "The House Servant," which draws out specific events and features of the correspondence and an often insightful analysis of her personality. Miller's Lucy is thus determined, diffident, sometimes sanctimonious but also kind, charitable and loving. Perhaps above all, he paints a picture of her as a loyal agent of John Hartwell Cocke and his evangelism, both religious and educational, and yet he also argues that these were values that she had made her own and that she was thus "indefatigable and inventive" in her attempts to encourage religiosity in her fellow slaves, whilst she "persevered" with her efforts to educate them despite the fact that this brought her both joy and disappointment in apparently equal measure, and even though she faced obstruction and threats from all sides. He also speaks of her "extraordinary commitment to Christ," her consistent, if "guarded" campaign for "more forceful preaching in the plain style" and her constant attempts to protect "the plantation family from the abuses of overseers or intemperate, un-Christian whites." Even those moments when she betrayed the plantation community to her master, Miller sees as a sign of her consistency, arguing that these actions, that "cost her the unquestioning trust of her fellow bondsmen [sic]... were prompted more by petty jealousies than by unblinking subservience," an analysis which suggests that Lucy's sense of self and instinct for self-preservation were the constant factors, while her responses to the competing allegiances of family, community and master were calculated in terms of contingent self-interest. *Ibid.*, 181-195, *passim*. Miller, however, had a luxury that I do not have, namely the opportunity to present 58 letters verbatim, and when one reads them all it is quite easy to 'get to know' Lucy as an individual, (or at least as the individual that she was prepared to be in correspondence with her masters). Presenting her in a more abbreviated form is rather more difficult, however, and the reader is advised to read the full range of her letters [*ibid.*, 192-263] to get a more rounded view of her epistolary selves.

⁶ In themselves, these intimations of conflicts between white overseers and a black house slave are very interesting and speak volumes of the trust that Cocke invested in Lucy. Indeed, they suggest that she provided him with an alternative window on the management of Hopewell, a way of extending his surveillance to encompass not only his slaves but also those that managed them, and although one might speculate that this was a duty that Lucy created for herself, the fact that she repeatedly reports on them suggests Cocke did not tell her to desist. That it brought her into repeated conflict with a succession of overseers is also interesting in that it demonstrates the suspicion that a literate slave, even one who merely corresponded with her master, could provoke white authorities. They thus also speak to larger issues of the culture of epistolary surveillance that masters such as Cocke attempted to construct (see Chapter Nine).

For instance, her first explicit mention of a problem with an overseer comes in a letter where she complains of Singleton's anger over her letter writing, apparently as a result of his suspicion (which was clearly not without foundation) that Lucy had been telling tales about him to her owner and his employer:

Hopewell[,] Nov the 18th 1855⁷

my Dear Master [*John Hartwell Cocke*]

I have taken my seat to write to you to relieve your mind from the anxiety which I know you feels to hear from us all. I received your letter dated Sep the 14th and it is not carelessness why it has not been answered for I always take pleasure in writeing to you, and I never feels satisfied when I neglect any thing that you desire me to do.

my reason for not writeing to you is this man that lives here he has such a great objection to my writeing to you. I thought that I would not write to you again while he stays here, but I know you were expecting a letter from me and wondering what is the matter with me. he told me that I am never to write his name in a letter to you while I live. I told him I would not write his name in letters to you. after he received your letter he made it known that he would not live here another year. I heard he is going to live with master John next year as him and his overseer has parted. when you write do not mention this letter to him.

....

However, it may be that one can in fact detect that the relationship between Lucy and Singleton was breaking down from her previous correspondence. Four months before this was written, Lucy wrote a letter to Cocke that contains a brief, but tantalizing, mentions of Singleton which may be entirely innocent, but which seems to have a tone of irritation about it which is not apparent in her earlier allusions to him, such as the instance when she actually invoked his authority in the letter of 28 August 1854. In this instance, however, her tone seems terse: "if mr Singleton has received any letter it is more than I know." Furthermore, if we trace the correspondence back another month to 20 July 1855, we find the following comment which suggests that

⁷ LS to JHC, 18 November 1855, in *ibid.*, 204. Note Lucy's literal interpretation of her promise to Singleton – she does not take it to mean she cannot discuss him, merely that she cannot name him – and yet she knows that she has betrayed it in spirit, as she reveals when she asks Cocke not to mention the letter to Singleton. This cunning outwitting of the bonds of faith and honesty on the one hand and domination and surveillance on the other is a good example of the ways in which the mask of obedience could be comfortably worn without compromising the slaves' ability to be true to themselves.

Lucy was nothing if not exasperated with the Singletons: "the white people that lives here takes no intress in prayer and it makes the people very backward indeed. I would give any thing in the world if there was one white person on this plantation that was a friend to God. I know that every thing would go on better."⁸

Already it seems as if a consistent and determined character, a person with a strong sense of self is emerging, but these incidents with Singleton are not the end of the story, and she seems to have been no happier with his replacement, one J. W. Carter. Certainly Carter does not receive the same level of abuse in her letters, but nonetheless one can again sense her disapproval in some of her comments on his behaviour. For instance, in October 1856, she wrote to Cocke to report a clash between Carter and some of the men, including Armstead, her husband, adopting a tone of voice and style of delivery which should by now be becoming familiar to the reader:

Hopewell[,] october the 13th 1856⁹

my Dear Master [*John Hartwell Cocke*]

I would have writen to you before this, but when I have to write any thing that is displeasing to you, it is always a berden to me to write. Since I wrote you last, their has been missbehaviour with some of the people. Armstead has had another falling out with mr Carter, and master John has been put to the truble to come here to have him corrected for his behaviour to mr C. uncle Charles has also rebelled against him. Others have also done wrong but the matter will not be investigated until mr Powell comes down, you will then receive farther information.

....

On its own this report may seem to suggest that it is Armstead and Uncle Charles rather than Carter who have earned her displeasure, but reading it closely I think we can detect whom the real target of her disapproval is. In the first place, no matter how much trust Cocke invested in her, it is unlikely that Lucy could have explicitly

⁸ LS to JHC, 28 August 1855, 20 July 1855, *ibid.*, 201-203. One might speculate that any of these comments may in fact have led to a letter from Cocke to Singleton in which the former not only scolded his employee but also let slip the source of his information, but this cannot be verified.

⁹ LS to JHC, 13 October 1856, *ibid.*, 210.

stated that Carter had brought this confrontation on himself and so I think we should expect that her criticism would be covert, and with this in mind, one should note the fact that she describes the problem as “another falling out” which suggests both that Carter is frequently unable to maintain his authority (which is born out in her comment that Uncle Charles “has also rebelled against him”) but also that Carter’s response to a mere “falling out” was excessive.¹⁰ In any case, his replacement, William N. Lawrence, began working at Hopewell in 1859, and one can only wonder to what extent Lucy’s disapproval contributed to his predecessor’s downfall. There is good evidence that she played her part, or at least that Carter saw her as instrumental in that Miller reports that one of Cocke’s plantation preachers, Rev. F. M. Craine, had to intercede to stop Carter “stomping” Lucy “for writing to Cocke behind his back.”¹¹

Initially Lawrence fared rather better at Lucy’s hand, but in due course he too would be forced to respond to her habit of speaking her mind to her master in her letters and would seek to limit and censor Lucy’s writing. However, while he met with her approval, his wife was another matter:

....

every thing seems to be going on very well. mr Lawrence has had no fuss with his hands atall. we all think a great deal of him for we can see in his daily walks and his conversation that he is a Child of god. the habits of his wife are the same as when you was here. she still uses the snuff and the Laudanum, by night and by day.... her children are spoilt as bad as ever[.] she whips them to day and humours to morrow and so her whipping does them no good atall. I never saw such Children in my life. it is a pitty for such a good man as mr L is to have such a family as he is got for they all imposes upon him. mrs L health continues to be so bad that she is gone up with her children to spend

¹⁰ Citing William K. Scarborough, *The Overseer: Plantation Management in the Old South*, (Baton Rouge, 1966), Miller notes that Carter was seen as a brutal and ineffective overseer by the slaves at Hopewell, and recounts that during the “three stormy years” he was overseer at Hopewell “the slaves conspired to destroy the cotton crop, pilfered and embarrassed him sufficiently so that R. D. Powell had to remind him of his duties.” *DMLSF*, 187, 206 n. 1.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 187. No citation given.

two weeks at her Fathers. mr L has been very uneasy about his crop, but seem to be in better spirits at present.

¹²
....

In her dislike for "mrs L" she was perhaps merely following her master's lead, since Cocke himself appears to have disliked Mrs Lawrence intensely, as he revealed in a letter to his son in which he described her as "a strenuous Mississippi tobacco dipper and opium Eater and withal a professed member of the Meth. Ep. – judge what must be a standard of religion where such a subject is tolerated,"¹³ but whether encouraged by Cocke, or simply not discouraged by him, her letter yet again reveals Lucy to have been unwilling to tolerate those who did not meet her exacting standards. Furthermore, as a letter she wrote a few months later demonstrates, that she was willing to so forthrightly make her feelings known yet again attests to her strength of character since she was prepared to go to great lengths to not only express her opinion but also to protect her right to do so in the face of threats and intimidation:

November the 22nd 1859¹⁴

my Dear Master [*John Hartwell Cocke*]

I received your letter yesterday, and was delighted to hear from you and to hear that you expect so soon to be with us. I am sorry to tell you my Dear Master that your letter caused me to see trouble. after reading it, mrs Lawrence desired me to hand it to her to read, and this I could not do, for I did not want them to know that I had written to you unbeknowing to them, for they want to see every line that I write to you, and they would have been very angry with me to see your letter was in answer to one they did not know I had written to you. I told mrs L. I had rather had no one read it but myself, that nothing was in it that concerned any one atall. she then desired her husband to make me give it up to them, and I then put it in the fire and burnt it up, and I would have rather taken any punishment than to have given it to them. They abused me very much with words, but did not strike me, she insisted that her husband would give me five hundred lashes, but he has not done it. I have given neither of them a cross word about it. mr Lawrence has writen you and I recond has given you an account of every thing, and as you expect so soon to be with us, I will say no more

your servant

Lucy Skipwith

¹² LS to JHC, 28 July 1859, *ibid.*, 223.

¹³ JHC to Cary Charles Cocke, 30 March 1857(9?), quoted in *ibid.*, 221.

¹⁴ LS to JHC, 22 November 1859, *ibid.*, 226.

PS I hope you will have in mind what I said to you last winter about keeping your own table in your own house, for the way that mrs L acted in several respects last winter, it is actually necessary that you should do so, and if you conclude to do so, get some new table Cloths as you come through Richmond[.] you also need a dinner table. I am afraid to direct my letter to you. I will direct it to miss Sally or I will have it directed to Birthier

Lucy Skipwith

What I would like to draw the reader's attention to in this letter (and the series of correspondence that preceded it) is that in positioning herself and situating her behaviour within this set of relations Lucy felt that she needed to tell Cocke how she had avoided surveillance, resisted domination and subverted plantation discipline, if only to construct herself as his only reliable agent of surveillance, domination and discipline, and Mr and Mrs Lawrence, Carter or Singleton as the subversives. Through this "emplotment," to utilize the terminology offered by Ricoeur, she thus constructs an identity that is "comprehensible" to herself and conforms to the needs of the her master, whilst also constructing characters for the villains of her piece.

We should thus also acknowledge the significance of "acting and suffering" in the constitution and performance of the self as well as the construction of others, both for oneself and for the other; as Ricoeur suggests:

I never forget to speak of humans as acting and suffering. The moral problem... is grafted onto the recognition of this essential dissymmetry between the one who acts and the one who undergoes, culminating in the violence of the powerful agent. Being affected by a course of narrated events is the organizing principle governing an entire series of roles of sufferers, depending on whether the action exerts an influence or whether its effect is to make matters better or worse, to protect or to frustrate. A remarkable enrichment of the notion of role concerns its introduction into the field of evaluations through the actions which have just been enumerated, then into the field of retributions, where the sufferer appears as the beneficiary of esteem or as the victim of disesteem, depending on whether the agent proves to be someone who distributes rewards or punishments.¹⁵

This is a telling description of the ways in which egodocuments, as narratives of everyday life and as performance pieces, both extend and curtail opportunities for the

¹⁵ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 145.

construction and representation of identities; indeed, I think there is a significant correlation here between Ricoeur's description of the "one who undergoes" and Cohen's idea of the self that must "cope with... many incompatible claims on [its] allegiance." I would like to suggest, however, that in our consideration of the slave letter writers (and the broader slave population), we need to consider them not merely as "sufferers," nor as "one[s] who undergo..." but also as "agents," capable of "narrating" their own characters, creating their own sense of "emplotment" and utilizing letters as egodocuments that represent these self-constructions in order to negotiate their place within the brittle relationships with the "powerful agents" who determined punishment and reward.

Whilst it may appear that this analysis would encourage an engagement with the slaves' letters as acts of self-construction where the narrative strategy of emplotment is deployed in a way which almost appears to testify to artifice, I think this needs some clarification, for though I am suggesting that the performance is tailored to the audience and that there is thus an active, reflective process at work, it not my intention to necessarily present slave letter writers as actively constructing artificial selves. By this I mean to re-emphasize and develop my qualification of the slave-as-dissembler thesis, for while the idea that slaves were artful dissemblers is not at issue, it is worth bearing in mind the extent to which habitual performance renders artifice something more than artificial, a representation that does in fact connect to a facet of the self that conforms to (or may very well confound) a particular set of expectations. As such, we need to keep in mind the discussion in the introduction of the importance of critical literacy, and the concept of the writing laboratory as a discrete location for experimentation and transformation, for while both these ideas similarly appear to suggest that the self-conscious literate subject constructs artificial representations, I think it more accurate to consider them in terms of the artifice of the narrative self.

To return to Lucy's letters, then, I would suggest that this idea of the slave letter writer as an artful narrator of herself is useful in that it makes what appear at

first sight to be the exceptional aspects of her correspondence with Cocke – her frankness, her forwardness, her willingness to tell him that she has stood up to one source of authority only to display her subordination to his – rather less exceptional, if no less remarkable. For by understanding her candour in terms of the narrative strategy of self-employment one can profitably consider Lucy's letters as demonstrating how she managed to "cope with... many incompatible claims on [her] allegiance without cracking under the strain" whilst also "preserving a reasonable sense of loyalty to [her] own sense of self, that is, to [her] individuality." In short, it demonstrates that the Lucy Skipwith who wrote these letters to Cocke, no matter how the contingencies of the power relationship between the two affected and effected her performance, was nonetheless self-possessed and self-confident.

Having shown, I hope, that we should see Lucy as sufficiently like Anthony, indeed sufficiently like us, to merit examining her identity, individuality and personality, in short her "sense of self," using a methodology and in terms that are not so different from the ones we use to understand and describe our own selves, the next question I would like to pose is how do the multiplicity of antagonistic (as well as complementary) allegiances to which she is subject interact with her "sense of self"? As Cohen clearly implies, while we may be ourselves in all of our interactions, the self that we project is nonetheless contingent on the situation we find ourselves in. In the present context, however, I would like to reformulate this and suggest that in fact each of these distinct, agonistic yet overlapping allegiances is both productive and reflective of a novel representation of the self. These hybrid re-presentations are, like the situations and relationships that produce them, frequently antagonistic yet also overlapping, in many ways distinguishable from one another, yet also part of a whole.

To relate this back to Lucy, we have already seen how consistent she is in the sense of the underlying personality that we can glimpse behind each of the masked representations of her self in her letters, but leaving aside these noises off, I would now like to consider these representations themselves. Are they consistent? What

features seem to be most pronounced, and what does she try to conceal? Looking at them like this what I hope to demonstrate is the diversity of her performance and the manifold selves which comfortably co-exist inside (or perhaps more accurately outside) Lucy's individuality, and furthermore to suggest that taken together these many representations are in fact the 'real Lucy', or at least as much of the 'real Lucy' as we can ever get to know as audience members. Perhaps, however, the Lucy we have seen so far is too consistent in her dedication to her master's will to deserve this analysis of her as a dissembler, and so I would like to examine the very last letter Cocke received from her, a letter written not by a slave to her master, but by a freedwoman to her former owner:

Hopewell[,] Dec 7th 1865¹⁶

my dear Master [*John Hartwell Cocke*]

I Received your letter a few days ago dated oct 14th it being nearly two months on the way.

I was truly glad to see that you were still alive & not yet gone the way of all Earth & that you were able to write to me once more. I was sorry I had to part from Armistead but I have lived a life of trouble with him, & a white man has ever had to Judge between us, & now be turned loose from under a master, I know that I could not live with him in no peace, therefore I left him for I wish to live a life of peace & die a death of both Joy and peace & if you have any hard feelings against me on the subject, I hope that you will forgive me for Jesus sake.

I Have a great desire to come to Va to see you & my relations there & I hope that I maybe able some day to do so. I have looked over my mind in regard to going to Liberia but I cannot get my consent to go there, but I thank you for your advice. none of our people are willing to go. I am still carrying on my School on the plantation & the Children are learning very fast.... I have been thinking of putting up a large School next year as I can do more at that than I can at any thing elce, & I can get more children that I can teach, but I do not know yet whither I will be at liberty to do so or not.

....

Some of every bodys black people in this Neighbourhood have left their homes but us. we are all here so far but I cannot tell how it will be another year.

I will now bring my letter to a Close hoping soon to hear from you again[.] I am as ever your Servant

Lucy Skipwith

¹⁶ LS to JHC, 7 December 1865, *DMLSF*, 262.

As we have already seen in Chapter One there is much in this letter that is significant not least because it occupies an important place as the very last piece of correspondence in the overall archive of letters. In terms of her representation and emplotment of self, however, it raises some interesting issues which are worth exploring at this juncture. In some ways she certainly seems to be employing similar narrative strategies as in the other letters cited above. For instance, the formalities of “dear Master” and “your Servant” remain unchanged and her determination to teach seems undimmed. With a slightly closer reading, however, notable differences become clear. In the first place, out of the fifty-eight surviving letters written by Lucy to John Hartwell Cocke this is the only one in which she capitalizes the ‘S’ of “Servant” in signing off. Given that throughout her correspondence she is somewhat haphazard in her allocation of capital letters this may simply be accident of penmanship signifying nothing, but as the only letter in the series written by a free Lucy it is tempting to conclude that this capital ‘S’ for “Servant” signifies a real change in her self-representation, if not in her self-perception. And what of the way in which describes her break-up with Armstead? On the one hand this is presented in the rather diffident fashion we have come to expect from her, especially the comment “if you have any hard feelings against me on the subject, I hope that you will forgive me for Jesus sake” which essentially forbids any criticism. On the other, however, her reasoning, that “I have lived a life of trouble with him, & a white man has ever had to Judge between us, & now be turned loose from under a master, I know that I could not live with him in no peace” seems to me to suggest a profound change in her representation of self, and indeed to her sense of self, in that she seems to be suggesting that she is only now being allowed, even forced, to be responsible for her own life and her own mistakes, and that Armstead is one of them.

Be that as it may, however, another feature that is very interesting is her rejection of his suggestion that she should go to Liberia. Bearing in mind that the whole point of Hopewell was originally to be a staging post for Cocke’s most promising slaves to be religiously and educationally prepared for colonization, this outright rejection is hardly the kind of obedience and devotion (to Cocke if not to his

overseers) we have seen from her in previous correspondence. Furthermore, the way in which she phrases it – “I have looked over my mind in regard to going to Liberia but I cannot get my consent” – may be idiomatic, but nonetheless suggests a certain disjuncture between the mask she wears for Cocke and her own sense of self.

The question is, is this the ‘real Lucy’ shaking off the masks and the dissembling of slavery days and showing her true colours, or is it actually a new mask? The former is certainly a tempting conclusion, but I think there is good reason to question it because I see no reason to assume that her repeated exploitation of the relationship with Cocke to further her own agenda when she was his slave was a less honest representation of her self-interest than her rejection of his suggestion that she and her fellow freedpersons should emigrate to Liberia. Certainly freedom means that she is free to disagree with Cocke on this issue in a way she was not free to disagree with him in the past, but I think it is a dangerous assumption to propose that her previous representations of self were mere masks and that suddenly freedom means that we can see her face. Instead, I would suggest that the self she represents in this final letter in the series is merely another partial view, an adaptation to new circumstances and their effects on her relationship with her former master. Such a reading does not deny that she might in some ways have been being more honest with him than she had been able to before, and it may well be that she was as reluctant to emigrate in 1855 as she showed herself to be in 1865. It is equally possible, however, that her rejection of Cocke’s offer was a response to emancipation and that the Skipwiths and other slaves at Hopewell would have willingly chosen colonization over slavery but not over freedom, and thus, tempting as it may be to construct this letter as the key to the real Lucy, such a conclusion seems to me to denigrate the ways in which she presented her epistolary self in slavery, to deny the rationale behind her responses to the limited choices she had available to her as a slave, and to misrepresent the complex interactions between her attempts at self-preservation and the webs of antagonistic allegiances within which she existed.

With all of this in mind, then, I would like to move on from the issue of the slave personality to a yet closer examination of the slave text, the letter, for as we shall see in the next chapter, if we are to treat such texts as performance pieces we need to pay careful attention to the realms of performance in which they played. In this respect, however, letters such as Lucy's are far from typical, for with the Skipwiths we have a remarkable level of contextual detail and extra-textual knowledge from which to reconstruct both the audience and the players, whereas with many others, perhaps even the majority of writers such contextual detail is hard to come by, and much must be gleaned from the individual document. The next section therefore consists in a case study of an individual slave, Virginia Boyd, whose single letter is virtually the only evidence we have of her existence. In such cases, as I will demonstrate, the historian must undertake a complex task of building context from text in a recursive, and oftentimes presumptive, hermeneutic circle, but as I hope to show this can be a virtuous one.¹⁷

¹⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, Emerson Buchanan (trans.), (Boston, 1967), 351-352. Here Ricoeur argues that "hermeneutics proceeds from a prior understanding of the very thing that it tries to understand by interpreting it," a dictum that provides a useful key to understanding this historian's practice of reading.

Part Three

Text, *Text*, and Context

Virginia Boyd's Letter to Rice C. Ballard

6 May 1853

Case Study

Virginia Boyd to Rice C. Ballard, 6 May 1853

Houston May 6th 1853¹Dear Sir [*Rice C. Ballard*]

P[ermit] me to address you a few lines which I hope you will receive soon. I am at present in the city of Houston in a Negro trader[']s yard for sale, by your order[.] I was present at the Post Office when Doctor Ewin took your letter out through mistake and red it a loud not knowing I was the person the letter alluded to[.] I hope that if I have ever done or said any thing that has offended you that you will forgive me, for I have suffered enough Crimes in mind to repay all I have ever done, to any one[.] you wrote for them to sell me in thirty days, do you think that after all that has transpired between me and the old Man² (I don't call names) that it[']s treating me well to send me off among strangers in my situation to be sold without even my having an opportunity of choosing for my self; it[']s hard indeed and what is still harder – for the father of my children to sell his own offspring yes his own flesh and blood[.] My god is it possible that any free born American would brand his character with such stigma as that, but I hope before this he will relent & see his error for I still beleave that he is possess of more honor than that[.] I no too that you have influence and can assist me in some measure from out of this dilemma and if you will god will be sure to reward you[.] you have a family of children and no how to simpathize with others in distress[.] all I require or ask [is] for an agent to be afforded hear to see to me [and? ti] me to Earn the money, honestly to buy my [children. If] I have to work my finger ends off [...] I will earn [...] evry dime[.] I do think in justice

[page 2]

[my] children should be set free[.] I [ask nothing?] for my self altho my youthfull days [were worn?] out in the service and grattification of the m[an tha]t now wants me and his children sold[.] is it Possible that such a change could ever come over the spirit of any living man as to sell his child that is his image[?] I don't wish to return to haras or molest his peace of mind & shall never try get back if I am dealt with fairly. I no that you have been prejudist a gainst me, by what [Pussel?]³ told you[.] one day you will

¹ Virginia Boyd to Rice C. Ballard, 6 May 1853, Ballard Papers, SHC.UNC-CH. Both sheets are damaged at the top and bottom edge along a fold about two and half inches from the left hand side and at corresponding points at the top and bottom right hand corners where some paper has either been lost through decay or intentionally torn, leaving a 'V' shaped void about an inch wide at its broadest point and about two inches high.

² This probably refers to Rice C. Ballard's business partner, Judge Samuel S. Boyd. Beyond her name, however, connecting Virginia to Judge Boyd is difficult, although the circumstantial evidence of his sexual exploitation and violent treatment of another slave woman, Maria gives some basis for this inference. Judge Boyd's dealings with his slave woman Maria are described in two letters Ballard received from J. M. Duffield (who may have fathered a child with Maria), J. M. Duffield to Rice C. Ballard, 20 March 1844; 29 May 1848, Ballard Papers.

³ The name here is difficult to read as it appears to have been altered by Virginia after she wrote the sentence and although I have been unable confirm this name through other manuscript evidence, this is also the spelling used by Troutman his comments on this letter. Troutman, 'Correspondences', 223.

find who is the rascal & who has injured you most. I have no motive in saying to you anything but the pure truth, when you come to know all she has said relative to you & matters concerning your family you will perhaps not have quite the confidence in all the tales she fabricates[.] I wish you to reflect over the subject and see if some little could be shown me for that pity and mercy you show to me god certainly will show you[.] what can I say more[?] if I ever have spoken hastily that which I should not I hope you will forgive me for I hope god has[.] I am humbled enough all ready hear among strangers without one living to whom I have the least shadow of a claim upon[.] my heart feels like it would burst a sunder[.] It will not be long ere I am Confined & the author of all my sufferings to be the means of my being thrown upon the charity of strangers in [...] when I most need a sympathizing friend is [hardly the re?]ward that [I expected?] to receive for making so [bold?] for his [...] satisfaction.

[page 3]

Will y[ou ... le]t me hear from you & say what y[our thoughts?] are relative to the proposition I make. I n[o you a]re honourable high minded man and in your [co]mmon moments you would wish justice to be done to all, and if I am a servant there is something due me better than my present situation[.] I have written to the Old Man in such a way that the letter can[']t fail to fall in his hands & none others[.] I use every precaution to prevent others from knowing or suspecting any thing[.] I have my letters written & folded put into envelopes & get it directed by those that don[']t know the contents of it for I shall not seek ever to let any thing be exposed, unless I am forced from bad treatment.

Virginia Boyd

Chapter Six

Reading Slaves' Letters: Virginia Boyd's text, *text* and context

To listen is already to be open to and existentially disposed towards: one inclines a little on one side in order to listen.... The small voice speaking in a certain undertone, as if in pain, is pitted, in this instance, against the privative mode of [the dominant] discourse, a commanding noise characteristically male in its 'inability to hear what the women were saying'.

Ranajit Guha, (1994)¹

The foregoing transcript is remarkable for many reasons, not least of which is the fact that the letter it describes was preserved, first by its recipient, Rice C. Ballard (a Virginia slave trader, who was also co-owner of a number of cotton plantations in the Mississippi Delta, and, by the time he died in 1860, master to more than 1,000 slaves), and then by his descendents, before finally, after having passed through many hands, being acquired by the University of North Carolina and archived in the Southern Historical Collection; such a journey through time and space is one which very few letters written or dictated by slaves have successfully made. But this letter is also remarkable for other reasons such as the candour with which Virginia Boyd speaks about her sexual exploitation at the hands of "the old Man" and the fact that she not only attempts to cajole, shame and even blackmail Ballard, but also reports to him that she has attempted to do the same to her abuser. Most remarkable for a historian conditioned to believe that 'empathy' lies at the heart of the historical endeavour is that here is a slave asking her master to "simpathize" with her.

¹ Ranajit Guha, 'The small voice of history', in Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty (eds.), *Subaltern Studies IX: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi, 1994), 9, citing Vasantha Kannabiran and K. Lalit[h]a, 'That Magic Time', in Kumkum Sangari and Suresh Vaid (eds.), *Recasting Women*, (New Brunswick, 1990), 199.

Yet for all of this, the text does remarkably poor justice to the *text* it is intended to describe.² In part this is due to simple problems of production – it must be transcribed and set into type to make for easy comprehension, manipulation and analysis – and in part it is simply a response to the conventions of historical writing, but be that as it may, it is important to keep in mind that in this process of transcription the transfer of meaning is precarious since, as the writing is transcribed and word-processed, it becomes part of a different order of knowledge; rather than a personal letter it is now ‘evidence’. Of course, this transformation began before transcription, began, in fact, when Ballard decided that this was correspondence worth keeping and not burning, but it is in the transcription from handwriting to typeface that there is perhaps the greatest potential to transform the meaning of a *text* since in transcription it is divorced from its materiality and its context, relocated from the moment in which it was created and the purpose it was created for, and situated in a new time, place, and purpose where its value is determined not by whether it persuaded Ballard to relent (it did not), but by what it can ‘tell us’ about the past.

As a historian, however, one is of course constrained to operate within this schema, and I am not suggesting that it is either desirable or profitable to make histories without it, but rather that if “forms affect meaning... we need to remember that presenting a text in a form that is not its original one can seriously impair readers’ comprehension.”³ This is an idea that fuels Roger Chartier’s many fears for the future of texts/*texts* in a digital age, and a subject which forms the unifying

² I use ‘text’ and ‘*text*’ to distinguish between a text *qua* text, which has an objective reality that consists in words, phrases, grammar, and so forth, and a *text* as an implicit dialogue that becomes meaningful only in a discursive, subjective sense. Furthermore, as I hope to make clear, the meaning of a *text* may not simply be re- or deconstructed by reading the words and phrases that make up its text, but is contingent upon aspects of its production, materiality, performance, and reception that lie beyond these limits.

³ Roger Chartier, *On The Edge of The Cliff: History, Languages, and Practices*, Lydia G. Cochrane (trans.), (Baltimore, 1997), 84.

thematic basis of his collection of essays, *Forms and Meaning*,⁴ in which he develops it by considering the example of the published text(s) of Molière's *George Dandin ou le Mari confondu* which, he argues, fail to capture the *texts* of its original performances "whose effects depend on numerous elements not immediately discursive: the setting of the comedy, the actors' voice and play, the action on the stage, and so on."⁵ What his argument does not make explicit, however, is the way in which other textual transformations such as transcription have similarly obfuscatory effects, and I would suggest that his proposal that the meaning of a performance piece becomes compromised by its textual transcription (and ever more so by its temporal, linguistic, and spatial translocation) might be usefully appropriated to describe the problematic nature of the historical exercise of textual transcription: if the project is to do more than simply document the literacy or literary products of a historical object and instead to explore how a historical subject utilised literacy and literary production in order to intervene in the workings of their world, one must keep in mind that transcription (or re-inscription⁶) has the potential to divorce words from the "numerous elements not immediately discursive," of a *text*.

Furthermore, Chartier's analysis of the way in which quite different meanings could be drawn out of a single performative *text* by two different contemporary audiences (in the case of *George Dandin*, one consisting of the court of Louis XIV, the second, "the world of the urban theatre" in which it was watched by the Parisian bourgeoisie), and his attempts to reconstruct both is itself instructive since it speaks to an essential issue that should inform our readings of letters such as Virginia

⁴ Roger Chartier, *Forms and Meaning: Texts, Performances, and Audiences from Codex to Computer* (Philadelphia, 1994). See also 'Texts, Forms, and Interpretations', in *idem*, *Cliff*, 81-89, which discusses the concept of the "sociology of texts," an idea pioneered in D. F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (London, 1986).

⁵ Roger Chartier, 'Writing the Practices', *French Historical Studies*, XXI.2, (1998), 260. For his analysis of Molière's *George Dandin* see *Forms*, 43-82.

⁶ By which I mean to emphasize that the *text* is inscribed with new meaning, even if the text is unchanged.

Boyd's; as letters they too were read and invested with meaning in at least two realms of performance – that of the slave that wrote them and that of the recipient that read them.⁷ These differing realms of performance had (and, if we consider the current re-presentation of Virginia's text as another distinct and discrete realm of performance, have) profound effects on the meaning of not only words, phrases, or sentences, but also upon the reception of the whole letter as a material *text* – what to Virginia Boyd might have seemed to be excellent chirography and sophisticated language might have seemed to Ballard to be little more than the childlike attempts of an inferior to imitate her betters, while to us they appear as obstacles to comprehension and readability which must be overcome by transcription/re-inscription, including the addition of punctuation marks (albeit indicated by parentheses), some explanatory footnotes, and the occasional insertion of inferences or ellipses where words are missing or illegible. The effects these differing realms of performance have upon meaning must not be underestimated, and thus as I transform Virginia's *text* from letter to evidence, re-inscribe it from a handwritten to a word-processed form, and transpose it from its historical to my historiographical present, both I and the reader must also keep in mind the inadequacy of the transfer of meaning, of just how much is lost and/or changed in transcription.

If we accept that “a text radically changes meaning, even when its letter remains unchanged, by differences in its typographical presentation, its format, [and] the layout of its pages,” then perhaps it would be better to present Virginia's letter as I do below (Plates i, ii, & iii) as a series of photographic reproductions.⁸ This is of course as much a trope of the historical printing press as the transcription with which I began, and thus forms a part of my thesis with a certain inevitability, but leaving aside these peculiarities of the historiographical process, I think such reproductions do have some advantages over the transcription – one can, for instance, see where

⁷ Chartier, *Forms*, 76-82.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

she seems to have rushed or paused, or written a well-worn phrase rather than a painstakingly constructed sentence – although in another sense I think this is a potentially even less successful tactic than transcription into type because these reproductions transform the *text* into an ‘artefact’. No longer a letter, Virginia’s writing is remade as an exhibit to be wondered at and admired, or an object to be critiqued, copied and catalogued.

Yet again, of course, one can see that this is a process that began before the letter was included in this piece, but it is perhaps the historian who plunders the archive who does the most to inscribe new meanings onto its contents, to change them from correspondence, legal documents or financial ledgers into testimony, evidence and [arte]facts. As Michel de Certeau put it, such a practice has a tendency to “domesticate the ‘dear departed’ so that they will not seem out of place in our shop windows or in our thoughts; we preserve them under glass, isolate them and deck them out so that they may edify us or serve as examples.”⁹ But of course we do

⁹ Michel de Certeau, ‘History and Mysticism’, Arthur Goldhammer (trans.), (1973), in Jacques Revel and Lynn Hunt (eds.), *Histoires: French Construction of the Past* (New York, 1995) 440. Cf. de Certeau, *History*, 118. *Idem*, *The Possession at Loudun*, Michael B. Smith (trans.), (Chicago, 2000; 1970), provides a good example of de Certeau’s own approach to avoiding (or at least highlighting) this problematic relationship between the historian and the historical text/text, in that he carefully balances his own words with an almost equal quantity of quotations from his sources with only mild typographical differences distinguishing the one from the other, thus attempting to minimize the way in which the authorial voice assumes hegemonic control over the voices of others. While this strategy could be criticized for disguising his selectivity in a kind of omnibus approach where large *tranches* of text give the false impression that he is allowing his subjects as much discursive freedom as he allows himself, behind this illusion there is an important reality: since reading is a personal, unique, and individual hermeneutic practice then allowing his readers to process not only his words but substantive (albeit carefully selected) excerpts from *texts* created by the objects of his historical study, their subjectivity is revealed to be no less potent than his own; by his placing of both the historical and historiographical text on what at least appears to be equal footing, de Certeau creates a *text* that encourages the reader to develop their own relationship with and understanding of both. According to Ben Highmore, *Michel de Certeau: Analysing Culture*, (London, 2006), this tactic of presenting a polyphonic, perhaps even cacophonous *text* in which “voices clash and disturb each other” (and here he is referring as much to the way in which the various archival sources “clash and disturb each other” as to the way in which they clash with and disturb the authorial voice) rather than presenting a symphonic and euphonious whole, is not intended to create “a more ‘authentic’, a more historical historiography,” [45-50], but instead, as de Certeau himself puts it, to emphasize that the practice of

performance in which George Dandin was first interpreted, and yet for Chartier (whose interest in Molière betrays his interest in the 'big voices of history'), such contextualization is perhaps rather easier than it is when we wish to "listen" to a voice as small and distant as Virginia's; compared to the multiplicity of archival sources by and about Molière, besides her own letter there is, so far as I know, only one other reference to Virginia Boyd in the archives, a letter from one C. M. Rutherford, a slave trader who on 8 August 1853 wrote to Ballard to confirm that Virginia and one of her children had been sold for \$1100 and asking for instruction on the disposition of another, elder child – we do not even know whether she had given birth by this point or whether she was still pregnant.¹³ Although as we have seen there are richer histories for some slave letter writers, for many others, perhaps the majority, this paucity of contextual detail is the norm, and therefore one must find an alternative approach which reads for the gestures towards context within texts, which in turn allows one to both [re]situate them as *texts* and [re]position oneself in relation to them. Indeed, I would suggest that it is only through this kind of recursive analysis that it is possible to reconstruct (albeit in a partial and contingent sense) the space from which Virginia, and others like her, were writing.¹⁴

One must therefore consider not only her situation – female, pregnant, cast out, and anticipating the imminent destruction of her family – but also such issues as her self conception, her understanding of the principles by which the trade in slaves (particularly female slaves) operated, and her knowledge of her captors. I am therefore proposing that while one must of course situate her letter within a larger context, this is a context that must be [re]constructed from textual clues.

¹³ C. M. Rutherford to Rice C. Ballard, 8 August 1853, Ballard Papers.

¹⁴ By space I mean to invoke not the physical space of a Texas slave trader's yard but the emotional, mental and intellectual space in which she formulated her ideas – the conceptual stage on which she played her performance, and indeed the stalls from which she alone could watch it. Having said this, it is worth bearing in mind that a slave trader's yard in the heat and humidity of a Texan summer must have been particularly uncomfortable for a woman in the later stages of pregnancy.

Furthermore, I am suggesting that it is through the process of reading back and forth between text and context that one begins to get a sense of the *text* of her performance, and finally that it is this situating of her self-knowledge that opens up the possibility of being able to “listen” to her “small voice” in the way that she might have heard it herself, of being “open to and existentially disposed towards” her, rather than allowing the “commanding noise” of hegemonic historiographical practice to silence it or so transform it as to make it blandly euphonious.

Charleston May 5th 1853

Dear Sir,

I am to address you a few lines which I hope you will receive soon, I am at present in the City of Houston in a Negro trader's yard, for sale, by your order I was present at the Post Office when Doctor Devin took your letter out through mistake and read it aloud not knowing I was the person the letter alluded to, I hope that if I have ever done or said any thing that has offended you that you will forgive me, for I have suffered enough since in mind, to repay all that I have ever done, to any one, you would rather than to sell me in thirty days, do you think after all that has transpired between me & the old man, I don't call names that its treating me well to send me off a mong strangers in my situation to behold without even my having an opportunity of choosing for my self, its hard in deed and what is still harder for the father of my children to sell his own offspring for his own flesh & blood My god is it possible that any free born American would hand his children with such a stigma as that, but I hope before this he will repent & see his error for I still believe that he is possesed of more honor than that I am too that you have influence and can assist me in some measure from out of this dilemma and if you will god will be sure to reward you, you have a father of children & no man to sympathize with others in distress all I require or ask is for an agent to be appointed here to see to me, & to help me to Earn the money, honestly to buy my freedom I have to work my finger ends off my every limb I do think in justice

Plate i: Virginia Boyd's letter to Rice C. Ballard, page 1.

Reproduced by permission of the Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Division, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Children should be set free. I for
myself altho my youthfull days out in
the service and gratification of the same. I now want
me & his children sold is a Parcel that such a change
could ever come over the spirit of any living man
as to sell his child that is his image. I want wish to return
to have as for protect his peace of mind & shall never be
get back if I am steatt with fairly. I see that you have
been prejudiced against me, by what Parulotta you one
day you said find who is the rascal & who has injured
you most. I have no motive in saying to you any
thing but the pure truth, when you come to know
all that she has said relative to you & matters concerning
your family you will perhaps not have as great
a confidence in all the tales she fabricates. I wish
you to reflect over the outfall and see if some little
could be shown me for that money & truly you show
to me good. Certainly will show you what can be
more if I ever have spoken hastily that which I should not.
I hope you will for give me for I hope god has, I am humbled
enough all ready. I hear a many strangers without one
living being to whom I have the least shadow of claim
upon, my heart feels like I would burst a dunder.
It will not be long ere I am confined & the author
of my suffering to be the means of being shown
upon the charity of strangers in the when I most
need a sympathizing friend, in
to receive for making so m
youthfull man

Plate ii: Virginia Boyd's letter to Rice C. Ballard, page 2.

Reproduced by permission of the Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Division, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

will you
what you
Lanah's son
and in your other ornaments you would wish justice
to be done to all, if I am a servant there is some thing
due me better than my present situation I have written
to the Old Man in such a way that the letter can't
fade to fall in his hands & none other I use every precaution
to prevent others from knowing or suspecting any thing
I have my letter written & folded put in the envelope I got
it directed by those that don't know the contents of
it for I shall not seek ever to let any thing
be exposed, unless I am forced from bad treatment at
Virginia Boyd

Plate iii: Virginia Boyd's letter to Rice C. Ballard, page 3.

Reproduced by permission of the Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Division, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Chapter Seven

Situating Slaves' Letters: Contextualizing Virginia Boyd

From the first standpoint [the content of history], things are moving all around us, but they can be analyzed. From the second, [the relation of our present historical point of view and our... object of study], it is we who have to move in respect to the ways things were lived and thought by their contemporaries. We can eliminate neither one nor other of these two aspects. Their conjunction defines the historian's work.

Michel de Certeau, (1969)¹

In terms of a contextualization developed from textual clues, there are a number of features of Virginia's letter that stand out. First, as has already been suggested, it is probable that the person that she refers to as "the old Man" was in fact Ballard's business partner in his cotton plantation ventures, Judge Samuel S. Boyd, a man who had previously violently sexually exploited at least one of his female slaves, although whereas Maria (the woman who suffered his abuses over at least four years), apparently attempted to resist his advances, it seems that Virginia may have calculated that it was better to submit than be forced.² Second, as she was clearly her master's 'concubine,' or perhaps more appropriately 'fancy maid,' and there is no textual evidence that she had any other duties, it is probable that she was in fact purchased primarily as a sex object.³ Moreover, this an idea that is given some

¹ Michel de Certeau, 'The Inversion of What Can Be Thought: Religious History in the Seventeenth Century', in *Recherches de science religieuse*, 57, (1969), 231, reprinted in, *idem*, *History*, 125.

² See J. M. Duffield to Rice C. Ballard, 20 March 1844; 29 May 1848, Ballard Papers, the first of which reports Boyd's abuse in melodramatic detail and the second of which (notably dated four years later) again testifies to the great "cruelties [Boyd] inflicted upon the feeble frame of that girl – and are frequently inflicted," an injustice Duffield sought to remedy by pleading with Ballard to allow him to purchase Maria.

³ I use the term 'fancy maid' as opposed to 'concubine' not only because it is the term used in the sources, but also because the former phrase does not have the problematic associations of latter, the more commonly used term for slave women who became their master's sexual partners, since "concubine" (defined in the OED as "a woman who cohabits with a man without being his wife, a kept mistress; (in polygamous societies) a secondary wife") suggests a certain complicity or consensuality which, for a bondswoman sold or utilized as a sexual slave, is inappropriate. While 'fancy maid' is the formulation used by Ballard's business associates Isaac and James Franklin, an alternative formulation is 'fancy girl' which is the phrase that was used by such authors as William Wells Brown, Fredericka Bremer, and Fanny Kemble. Isaac Franklin to Rice C. Ballard, December 8

credence by the fact that this was an aspect of the slave trade in which Franklin, Armfield, and Ballard's slave trading company was intimately involved.⁴ Third, since there is nothing to indicate that this letter was dictated, and indeed much to suggest otherwise, it would appear that she was highly literate, which in turn suggests that she had had a 'privileged' upbringing, a factor which also fits with the idea that she was indeed a 'fancy maid.' Fourth, not only was she pregnant but she was also already the mother of two of Boyd's children, for whose future she was not only extremely concerned but also had had expectations; as their master's offspring they might have been freed, and that this was what she felt was their due is apparent from the way in which she repeatedly emphasizes his duty to them, and again this appears to corroborate the evidence that she was a 'fancy maid' since this hope was something that informed many bondswomen's 'choices' about how to respond to sexual predation. Fifth, it is apparent that she had not only fallen from favour with "the Old Man" but had also fallen from grace with Ballard having been either betrayed or undermined by Pussel (another woman and probably another slave), and

1832; James Franklin to Messrs. R. C. Ballard & Co., March 27 1832; cited in Edward E. Baptist, "'Cuffy,'" "Fancy Maids," and "One-Eyed Men": Rape, Commodification, and the Domestic Slave Trade in the United States', *AHR*, CVI.5, (2001), 1 n1, 1639 n54. For other contemporary commentators use of the term "fancy girl" see for instance, Brown, *Clotel*, 63; Fredericka Bremer, *The Homes of the New World: Impressions of America*, (2 vols., New York, 1853), I, 373, II, 535; Frances Anne Kemble, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgia Plantation*, John Scott (ed.), (Athens, 1984), 282.

⁴ Baptist, "'Cuffy'", 1641-1650. Ballard's business ties with this company dried up in the course of the 1840s as he transformed himself from a speculator into a planter, but he nonetheless retained personal contacts with his former partners and continued to do business with them. Indeed, two letters dated 28 October 1854 and 29 November 1854 from one P. B. January suggest he was still involved in the 'fancy' trade even at this late date. [P. B. January to RCB, 28 October 1854 and 29 November 1854, Ballard Papers.] Furthermore, during the time Ballard was actively involved in the slave trade, the letters he received from Isaac and James Franklin were quite frank about their own sexual predation in such a way as to implicate Ballard as a fellow predator. Indeed, this correspondence, replete as it was with coarse banter about "one-eyed men," (a euphemistic reference to their penises which they also used to describe themselves, Ballard and other men who were interested in purchasing 'fancy maids'), and descriptions of the sexual vulnerability and rape of the enslaved girls and women that they trafficked, suggests that Ballard was a willing and eager participant in both their repartee and the rape and sexual abuse of slave women it served to both describe and disguise. It thus seems not unreasonable to assume that his exploitation of bondswomen's sexual vulnerability was not something that necessarily ended when he transformed himself from slave trader to slaveholder.

the complex web of power that this reveals, not only in terms of the relationship between Ballard and Boyd, but also in terms of the kinds of dynamics that governed relationships between women, between slaves, and between slaves and masters, exemplifies just how difficult a task she took on in attempting to negotiate with Ballard, and indeed just how desperate she must have been to try. Sixth, her tone is undeniably angry and prideful, and so, however much she attempts to keep her place, if one is attempting to position oneself in a way which will allow a productive involvement with Virginia's *text*, her pride and her anger, as well as her pathos and despair, must be born in mind. Taken together, these interrelated textual/contextual issues suggest a number of significant connections that may be drawn between the specifics of Virginia's position and more general aspects of the situation in which she found herself, and so to begin with it is worth examining the suggestion that she was Boyd's 'fancy maid' in greater detail since if this is accurate then a number of factors come into play which offer further contextual detail and in turn allow a more complicated and nuanced involvement in her *text*.

What is quite clear from her letter is that although Ballard was responsible for selling Virginia, he was certainly not her abuser, "the old Man," but at the same time there is also strong textual evidence that his relationship with both Virginia and her abuser was more than simply that of trader to slave and trader to seller. Instead, Virginia demonstrates not only familiarity with Ballard and his family but also takes a tone which implies that they must have known each other for some time, something which is apparent in such phrases as "in your [co]llor moments" and "if I ever have spoken hastily." At the same time she also suggests that Ballard has "influence" with "the old Man," which speaks to the sort of relationship that he had with Boyd, a business partner who brought far less to the partnership than did Ballard who as a slave trader had sent his agents to seek out failing plantations and then bought several of them out lock, stock, and barrel; it was these plantations that formed the

basis of Ballard and Boyd's holdings.⁵ Beyond this point, there is also further textual evidence that the abuser was probably Boyd in that the way in which Virginia describes her status suggests that she was co-owned by Ballard and her abuser – had she been hired out then the “old Man” would not have owned her offspring, but had Ballard not had a stake in her ownership and some say in selling her, then why would Pussel's prejudicing him against Virginia have mattered, and why indeed would Virginia have written to him?

All of which, along with her surname, leads one to conclude that Boyd must indeed have been “the old Man.” However, this argument does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that she was purchased as his ‘fancy maid,’ and in fact it might be construed as suggesting something very different, namely that Virginia had instead been born and raised on one of Ballard and Boyd's plantations, and then found herself the target of Boyd's sexual abuse. Certainly there is no reason to imagine that any slave could not end up facing sexual assaults from the master of the plantation on which they grew up, even as Elizabeth Fox-Genovese points out, if that master were also their father,⁶ but again the text of her letter suggests otherwise, in particular because she does not refer to being separated from family or kin, a common feature of letters from slaves who were being sold away from partners, parents, siblings, or extended family.⁷ Instead the closest Virginia gets to mentioning separation from loved ones is the following comment which would seem to confirm my inference:

I am humbled enough all reddy hear among strangers without one living to whom I have the least shadow of a claim upon[.] my heart feels like it would burst a sunder[.] It will not be long ere I am Confined & the author of all my sufferings to be the means of

⁵ Baptist, ““Cuffy””, 1629.

⁶ Fox-Genovese, *Household*, 315.

⁷ See, for instance: Sargry Brown to Moses Brown, 27 October 1840, in *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 16 September 1841; Susan & Ersey to Beverley Tucker, 24 October 1842, Hillhouse Papers; Emily Russel to Nancy Cartwright, 22 January 1850, in *Monthly Illustrations of American Slavery*, 1 May 1850; Marie Perkins to Richard Perkins, 8 October 1852, *ST*, 46-47, 13-14, 87, 96-97. Pheobia and Cash to Mr Delions [Lyons], 17 March 1857, *BIB*, 57-58.

my being thrown upon the charity of strangers in [...] when I most need a sympathizing friend is [hardly the re?]ward that [I expected?] to receive for making so [bold?] for his [...] satisfaction.

Of course, one might read the line “my heart feels like it would burst a sunder” to suggest that she was indeed being parted from family, but that in the next few lines, as she is contemplating giving birth, she speaks not of the fact that she will need her mother, sister, aunt or grandmother, but “a sympathizing friend” suggests that she had long ago put aside any hope of seeing family again.⁸ What is more, that her separation from her family and kin seems to have taken place some time past is yet more evidence to suggest that she was a ‘fancy maid’ since such separation and the consequent isolation greatly increased a bondswoman’s sexual vulnerability, and so formed an important phase in the process of transforming an unfree female into a saleable sex object.⁹

This series of textual clues, combined with the archival evidence of Boyd’s history of exploiting females slaves’ sexual vulnerability, and Ballard’s past as a partner in a slave trading firm that was deeply implicated in the trade in ‘fancy maids’ (so much so, in fact, that Isaac Franklin once joked to Ballard about the

⁸ Cf. Emily to Amy Nixon, 12 February, 1836, *Human Rights*, I, (May, 1836), 2, ST, 22-23. In this letter a daughter writes to her mother describing how her husband has been sold away from her, despite her entreaties, and then goes on to allude to the imminent birth of a child, saying “O! mother, what shall I do? A time is fast approaching when I shalt want my husband and mother, and both are gone!” Whatever the differences in style, the sentiment here is very different that Virginia’s reference to “a sympathizing friend.”

⁹ Although this is a point that Baptist barely touches upon in his analysis of the trade in ‘fancy maids’ it is one which is implicit in the accounts he gives of the way in which the company of Franklin, Armfield and Ballard removed “likely” women from the Seaboard states, where they made most of their purchases, to the thriving slave markets of New Orleans, Natchez, Mobile, and Tallahassee, and thence sold them on to planters throughout the Mississippi Delta region and the new states and territories of the slave South-West. While this was a journey that much of their “stock” was forced to make, for these women the stakes were different – sold singly and at prices so high that they were unlikely to be bought along with other family members, they almost inevitably found themselves isolated by a combination of market forces and calculated sexual predation; one is of course reminded of the contemporary situation of women and children “trafficked” for the purpose of sexual exploitation, whose social isolation (which is of course compounded by language barriers, fear of authorities and of repatriation), makes them all the more vulnerable to their abusers. Baptist, “Cuffy”, 1644 n68.

possibility of diversifying and opening a “whore-house located and established at your place, Alexandria, or Baltimore for the Exclusive benefit of the consern & [its] agents,”)¹⁰ strongly suggest that Virginia was indeed Boyd’s ‘fancy maid’ and furthermore that she had in fact been bought for that purpose, which brings us to the third issue I have drawn out of Virginia’s *text* – ‘privilege.’ As has already been noted, this is a problematic term to use, but nonetheless it has a certain provenance in talking about slave status and particularly slave literacy and letters that needs to be acknowledged. As has been shown, the majority of slave letter writers (including those whose words were dictated to amanuenses) were bondspeople who came from the ranks of house rather than field slaves, urban rather than plantation slaves, and skilled rather than unskilled slaves. Moreover, as I have already argued, to view such slaves as members of a ‘privileged elite’ is a problematic approach since it suggests not only a somewhat uncritical acceptance of the hierarchy masters attempted to impose upon slave communities, despite the fact that high status in the master’s eyes did not always correspond to high status in the eyes of one’s peers or in one’s own self-concept, but also of the idea that greater proximity to the ‘Big House’ and intimate day to day interaction with whites was indeed a *privilege* – for a slave such as Virginia it certainly appears to have been the opposite.¹¹

Saying this, however, is not to suggest that literacy (or access to literate others) was not, in and of itself, a *privilege* which afforded slaves particular opportunities for self-expression and negotiation not available to other slaves, and in this respect it is important to keep in mind that literacy and letter writing were

¹⁰ Isaac Franklin to R. C. Ballard, 11 January 1834, cited in *ibid.*, 1619.

¹¹ With regard to these issues the readers attention is again drawn to Starobin, ‘Bondsmen,’ 50; *BIB*, xix-xx; *ST*, lxiii; *DMLSF*, 14. I am grateful to Heather Andrea Williams for her suggestion that literacy should indeed be seen as a profoundly significant *privilege* when one considers how few slaves were in fact able to read and write. Moreover, with this in mind I would also like to suggest that no matter how much historians may be guilty of ‘privileging’ literary sources over other forms of evidence, there is a certain extent to which, when we turn our attention to those representatives of the historiographically underprivileged (in every sense) who were *privileged* enough to be able to write their own narrative selves, we might legitimately claim to be taking our cues from them.

practices that were valued within slave communities and by slaves themselves. A good example of this sense of *privilege* may be found in Heather Andrea Williams' description of the case of Elijah Marrs, a slave who educated himself in childhood "because he thought he would have something important to do in the future," and who, as a young man during the upheavals of the Civil War led a group of fellow slaves across Union lines to enlist. In Williams' view it was literacy (no doubt along with many other qualities) that marked Marrs out "as a leader within his community," first as a slave, then in the army (where he was promoted to duty sergeant), and thence even on into his life a freedman, an argument which constructs literacy as a *privilege* that could confer 'elite' status in the eyes of the African American community both in slavery and in freedom.¹² This in turn suggests that we should see Virginia as possessed of some *privilege* at least insofar as her literacy allowed her to attempt to negotiate with (and even blackmail) her owners and abusers.

But this idea of Virginia as *privileged* inevitably raises the question of how she came to be so, and again I think Baptist's analysis of the fancy trade suggests that a possible answer is to be found in her "background," if this is taken as signifying both her upbringing and her parentage. To understand what Baptist means by this, it is important to recognize the connections that he highlights between sexual trafficking, inter-racial rape, and a larger Southern discourse which gave them meaning. This discourse combined constructions of sexuality, sociability and honour, gender, 'race' and slavery into a code of conduct that was particularly proscriptive but tantalizingly exciting for "one-eyed men" to transgress. In this context, what made a female slave into the 'finest' of 'fancy maids' was not merely her beauty or comeliness (though these were no doubt important), but outward signs of a 'privileged' upbringing, such as literacy and manners, combined with that ultimate

¹² Williams, *Self-Taught*, 45-49.

signifier of 'privileged' parentage, a light complexion.¹³ Through the commodification and rape of these bondswomen "one-eyed men" such as Boyd made them the objects of a cultural praxis that at one and the same time violated and endorsed the precepts of the master discourse.

Baptist illustrates this thesis with an analysis of a letter dated 27 September 1834 from Isaac Franklin to Ballard, in which the author makes particular reference to Charlott, a "yellow girl" Ballard shipped to him and who was eventually sold for \$900, a considerable sum to pay for any slave in 1834.¹⁴ The letter, however (which pre-dates her auction), reveals that Franklin knew very well how high the price would go due to her 'background', remarking: "you mentioned that you purchased her from some Branch of the Barber [Barbour] family... the respectability of that family will have great effect."¹⁵ According to Baptist's reading of this comment, then, Franklin was actually revealing the subtext of the entire trade in and sexual exploitation of 'fancy maids,' a subtext in which two mutually reinforcing fetishistic fantasies fed off, and into, one another. The first of these related to her 'privileged' upbringing which "equipped her to mime the conventions of the polite and proper parlor, the centerpiece of a domestic sphere increasingly dominated by female moral and cultural taste," thus rendering their commodification of her sexual vulnerability,

¹³ Baptist, "Cuffy", 1642-1643, 1644-1647.

¹⁴ Cf. Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside The Antebellum Slave Market*, (Cambridge, 1999), 113-114. Johnson shows that the prices paid for "fancies" were occasionally "three hundred percent of the median prices paid in a given year – prices above \$1500 in the first decade of the [nineteenth] century and ranging from \$2000 to \$5233 afterwards," and also describes the way in which very young girls were identified as potential "fancies" citing the example of a letter from Phillip Thomas to William Finney, 36 July 1859 in which Thomas describes a "13 years old Girl, Bright Color, nearly a fancy for \$1135." Strikingly, Johnson also suggests that these prices were as much a measure of the buyer as of the commoditized slave body, since they validated the buyer's sense of his own power in that "[n]o other man could afford to pay so much; no other man's needs could be so substantially measured; no other man's desires would be so spectacularly fulfilled... His potency was gauged by his buying power." Such an analysis sits well with and usefully complicates Baptist's argument that "one-eyed men" were performing, both publicly and privately, a ritual of violation that was as much about the physical pleasure they hoped to derive from the sexual exploitation of their purchases as it was about the fetishistic psychological pleasure of transgression.

¹⁵ Isaac Franklin to R. C. Ballard, 27 September 1834, cited in Baptist, "Cuffy", 1644 n73.

and their rape of her as “a hostile satire of the parlor ideal, a rebuke of and a recourse against uppity white women.”¹⁶ The second related to the fact that Charlott’s skin colour attested to mixed parentage, to the fact that her master or one of his sons was probably her father, something that not only added a further fetishistic pleasure to the symbolic defilement of the white parlour but which also spoke to what Baptist earlier describes as “a frisson, an implication, of the sadistic or sexual (or both) power and pleasure that created the precious commodity thus consumed.”¹⁷

Clearly, these insights should have important implications for our reading of Virginia’s letter, but before returning to her text I would like to briefly expand upon the story of Charlott by considering another account out of the many (both fictional and real) that describe the sale of light-complected, ‘privileged,’ female slaves, the prices they could command, and the explicit sexual component of their value, since the details that these stories provide both complement and complicate the picture painted by Baptist, which in turn allows a more nuanced view of Virginia’s situation.¹⁸ In 1849 Fredericka Bremer, a Swedish author, travel writer and

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1648.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1636. Cf. Johnson, *Soul*, 154-156; Patterson, *Death*, 261; W. J. Cash, *The Mind of The South*, (London, 1971), 59, 118; Jordan, *White*, 136-178 *passim*. Again, Johnson’s analysis complicates Baptist’s by suggesting that “[i]n addition to outward delicacy and inward gentility, the racial gaze of the slaveholder projected sexual meaning onto the bodies of light-skinned women... For slave buyers, the bodies of light skinned women and little girls embodied sexual desire and the luxury of being able to pay for its fulfilment – they were the projections of slaveholders’ own imagined identities as white men and slave masters.... [The] hybrid whiteness of slaves was packaged and measured by traders and imagined into meaning by the buyers: into delicacy and modesty, interiority and intelligence, beauty, bearing and vulnerability. These descriptions of light-skinned slaves were projections of slaveholders’ own dreamy interpretations of the meaningfulness of their own skin color.” Yet such an explanation is perhaps incomplete, for as Patterson argues (in a development of positions put forward by Cash and Jordan), guilt was also a profoundly important piece of this behaviour, for Southern men who sexually exploited their slave women were caught in a vicious cycle: on the one hand this “hedonistic exploitation... was an assault on the integrity of the idolized [white] women”; on the other their culture made such sexual misconduct and transgression of the colour line dangerously exciting.

¹⁸ For a similar ‘fictional’ account see, for instance, Brown, *Clotel*, 85-88, which clearly illustrates the dollar value of the combination of ‘background’ and sexual vulnerability. Brown’s novel is of course presented as a fiction and was no doubt intended to play to a particular audience that found the sexual exploitation of light skinned slaves both horrifying and titillating (see n20 below), but Brown wrote

suffragist, travelled to the Americas and toured extensively in the United States and Caribbean for the next two years. As a politically-savvy and socially-aware observer, as well as a high-status traveller who utilised her fame and personal contacts to open many doors, her narrative of this tour, presented in the form of the letters she wrote back to Sweden, provides an illuminating body of evidence on Antebellum America, and in particular on the way in which Americans were struggling with, and over, slavery. For herself, however, although her opposition to slavery was never in doubt, it was the slave markets that horrified her most of all, as is clear from her description of an auction she witnessed in New Orleans: "I saw nothing especially repulsive in these places excepting the whole thing; and I can not help feeling a sort of astonishment that such a thing and such scenes are possible in a community calling itself Christian."¹⁹ Like many white critics of slavery, however, Bremer saved her greatest astonishment and outrage for the treatment of light-skinned slaves, and one such moment is caught in the following description of a scene she witnessed on

from a position of considerable insight having once been hired out to a slave trader and witnessing the working of the Antebellum slave market from the peculiar perspective of a slave (and a light complected one at that) who was there not as an item for sale but as a participant in the sales process. Furthermore, other historical examples add weight to Brown's description such as the case of the aforementioned Emily Russel: on January 22 1850 Russel, the daughter of Nancy Cartwright (a washerwoman who had bought her own freedom and moved to New York), wrote a desperate letter to her mother from a trader's yard in Alexandria, Virginia, where she, along with her sisters Sally and Hagar and their children, were being held by the company of Bruin and Hill in preparation for being transported to New Orleans for sale. Cartwright in turn enlisted the help of New York abolitionists and on 28 January William Harned wrote to Joseph Bruin to ask at what price he would prepared to sell Emily (as well as her sisters and their children). Bruin set the price for Sally and her four children at \$2,800, Hagar and her seven children at \$2,500, whilst with regard to Emily he stated "we... cannot afford to sell the girl Emily for less than \$1,800... We have had two or three offers for Emily from gentlemen of the South. She is said to be the finest-looking woman in this country." Given the fact that she was light-complected, had had, as her letter attests, a 'privileged' upbringing, and the comment on her exceptional beauty and the particular interest of "gentlemen of the South," the price differential between her and her sisters suggests that the company of Bruin and Hill were calculating, like the many other traders and auctioneers involved in the 'fancy' trade, just how much her 'background' and sexual vulnerability were worth. Emily Russel to Nancy Cartwright, 22 January 1850, and William Harned to Joseph Bruin, in *Monthly Illustrations of American Slavery*, 1 May 1850, *ST*, 87. Bruin's reply is quoted in Bancroft, *Trading*, 332.

¹⁹ Bremer, *Homes*, II, 200.

visiting a Washington slave pen, in which she allows her ironic transcription of the slave trader's patter to convey all of her horror:²⁰

There were now some very splendid articles for sale, which were to be sent down South. Among these there was a young girl who had been brought up in all respects 'like a lady;' she could embroider and play on the piano, and dress like a lady, and read, and write, and dance, and all this she had learned in the family which had brought her up, and who had treated her in her childhood as if she had been their own. But, however, her mind had grown too high for her; she had become proud, and now, to humble her, they had brought her here to be sold.²¹

The connection between this story and the story of Charlott should, I think, be obvious – indeed it is easy to imagine Charlott being bought up by Ballard or one of his agents from just such a situation, while the background of Bremer's unnamed

²⁰ The extent to which it was light-complected slaves rather than those with darker skins that appealed to Northern sensibilities (and prurience) is amply illustrated by the many well publicized cases of young, 'white-skinned' girls such as Emily Russel whom Abolitionists practically fell over themselves trying to free, something they were perhaps rather less prone to do for their darker skinned sisters. Two recent articles, Mary Niall Mitchell, "Rosebloom and Pure White," Or So It Seemed', *AQ*, LVI.3, (2002), 369-410, and Stephan Talty, 'Spooked: The white slave narratives', *Transition*, X.1 (2000) 48-75, explore different aspects of this racialized discourse which are revealing of Northern attitudes towards light-skinned slave women. Mitchell argues that images of 'white skinned' slaves appealed to Northerners on many levels: "[b]ecause the girls looked white, their images appealed to Victorian sentiments about white rather than black or 'colored' girlhood; indeed, while they pressed for the abolition that would free white-skinned children... they left the black child and her plight in the shadows. Furthermore, the pictures played upon fears that white people could become enslaved in the South, should slavery continue to spread, fears that had become more prominent as the sectional debate deepened. They also raised for consideration the interracial sex that had produced seemingly white non-white progeny, and they fanned northern fascination with light-skinned 'fancy girls' sold as slaves in the New Orleans market" [373]. Talty focuses his attention on the mock slave auctions Henry Ward Beecher, a Presbyterian Minister and prominent abolitionist, conducted from his pulpit in order to raise money to buy 'white-skinned' Christian children out of slavery, and the way in which the sexual vulnerability and, as Beecher never failed to emphasize, inevitable rape of these girls played a central role in motivating his audience into what he himself described as a "panic of sympathy." Over time, Talty argues, these auctions "grew into passion plays of sexual innocence, money, and redemption. The girls (always Christian, always pretty) grew whiter and whiter, until in 1856 Beecher 'sold' a captive who was completely indistinguishable from his fairest parishioner. He dressed 'Sarah' head to toe in virginal white and played with her flaxen hair, letting it fall to the floor in shining waves – its straightness a clear sign of her racial purity. He kept photographs of all the girls; late in life, he liked to leaf through them and reminisce. 'White and beautiful,' he called them in his autobiography. 'Flaxen-haired children born under the curse of slavery.' One critic remarked that if Beecher ever auctioned off a chattel slave who was 'very homely and very black,' it was never recorded." [51- 52]

²¹ Bremer, *Homes*, II, 492-493. Cf. *Ibid.*, I, 373.

slave certainly makes it likely she would have shared Charlott's fate – but I would also like to suggest that this threefold connection between sexual vulnerability, skin-colour, and a 'privileged' background can be profitably utilised to further situate our understanding of Virginia, since while her text attests to the former (sexual vulnerability), it also suggests the latter ('privilege'), and while one may only speculate as to whether she was also, like Charlott, a "yellow girl," there is cumulative evidence that increases the likelihood that she was.

In particular, both as text and as a *text* Virginia's letter is indicative of a 'privileged' background, and although this does not prove that she was light complected, it is also not an unreasonable inference. Certainly, the ability of house slaves, amongst whom women were the majority, to 'steal' an education was significant and so there is no *prima facie* connection to be made between literacy and either skin colour or 'privilege'/*privilege* but there are nonetheless profound differences between a 'ladylike' education on the one hand, and bible literacy or the stolen education of the autodidact on the other. Moreover, while slave masters' wives and daughters might have enjoyed doing their religious duty by teaching a favourite slave to read the bible, such indulgence rarely went so far as giving them either other reading matter or schooling them in how to write, a far more dangerous and potentially disruptive skill; as Fox-Genovese has observed, "[s]lave girls training rarely included the instruction in letters so important for slaveholder's daughters."²² What the combination of the Bremer example and what we know of Charlott illustrates, however, is that one of the rare exceptions to this rule was the 'privileged' upbringing that some masters afforded their own slave children, 'privileges' that they would almost never allow or provide for other bondspeople's offspring.

²² Fox-Genovese, *Household*, 156. For comments on the limits whites placed on slaves' education, and in particular their attempts to restrict it to bible literacy and to reading and not writing see Janet Duitsman Cornelius, "When I Can Read My Title Clear": *Literacy, Slavery, and Religion in the Antebellum South* (Columbia, 1991), 105-109, while Williams, *Self-Taught*, 6-29, *passim*. provides an analysis of the ways in which slaves sought (and found) ways to educate themselves.

In Virginia's case, therefore, it is not merely the fact of her literacy or education, but the quality that should be noted, and the standard of both her chirographic and literary skills suggest first, that she was taught by slaveowners and not fellow slaves, and second, that this teaching was not limited to bible literacy, and her text *qua* text is revealing in this respect. Witness, for instance her vocabulary, grammar, and spelling – not only can she spell complex words such as “alluded,” “empathize,” “fabricates,” and “transpired,” (even if she has problems with spelling “gratification,” “dilema,” or “prejudist”), but she uses them appropriately. Witness too her strong grasp of the formalities of letter writing that is apparent from her very proper opening – “Dear Sir, Permit me to address you a few lines” – to the constructions she uses to conclude – “what can I say more,” and “Will y[ou] ... [le]t me hear from you.” Furthermore, her phraseology is complex and sophisticated and this suggests to me that she had not only been permitted an education, but that she had also had access to books other than the Bible, since phrases such as the climactic “its hard indeed and what is still harder,” or the anaphoric “one day you will find who is the rascal & who has injured you most,” sound not only more like literary rather than oral constructions, but also as if they were drawn from contemporary romantic literature (ladylike reading matter) rather than biblical sources. Finally, it is also worth noting that Virginia's handwriting (Plate iv) bears comparison to the handwriting of a privileged planter's daughter, such as Sarah Brownrigg Sparkman (Plate v), and while there is, of course, a great variability in writing styles both within and between people of all social classes, Virginia's careful and decorative yet fluent lettering nonetheless suggests that she was not only taught to write elegantly but also practiced frequently, which again seems to indicate a ‘privileged’ upbringing.

Ed. Ball
Warren County, Virginia
Missouri

Houston May 5th 1837

Dear Sir,

I am to address you a few lines which I hope you will receive soon, I am at present in the city of Houston in a Negro trader's yard for sale, by your order I was present at the Post Office when Doctor Blair took your letter out through mistake and sent it to a loud, not knowing, Texas the friend the

Plate iv: A sample of Virginia Boyd's Handwriting

Reproduced by permission of the Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Division, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

My Dear Sister

Mississippi January 4 1836

I should certainly not have furnished your affectionate letter and truly to shame it was left remained unanswered so long, but the gentlemen have been such good correspondents that I thought it would answer as an excuse that together with others has been the cause but as I have made my apology depending on your forgiveness. I begin with my journey. The last letter I wrote was to Aunt Boston which was mailed at New Orleans, the weather was extremely cold and continued so that prevented my writing we left there after being detained by the river we had it fixed and it was so high that we unloaded our Wagon and carried all the things over which was quite a job, we only made a short drive on our way at a truly open the only one I saw that I would have been willing to have gone in the woods. The Land was rich near

Plate v: A sample of Sarah Brownrigg Sparkman's Handwriting²³

Reproduced by permission of the Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Division, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

In the light of such textual, *textual* and, indeed, artefactual evidence, therefore, I think it is legitimate to suggest that Virginia came from a 'privileged' background as well as having acquired some significant *privileges*, and, with Bremer's description of the unnamed slave she saw in Washington in mind, this in its turn suggests a certain way of reading Virginia's *text*, since although there are fundamental differences between Bremer's example and Virginia's situation, she nonetheless situates her experience within the same discourse of being "humbled" that was utilised by the Washington trader Bremer mimicked. Indeed, I think it is significant to note that Virginia describes being humbled in such a way as to suggest

²³ Sarah Brownrigg Sparkman to Miss Mary W. Brownrigg, 4 January 1836, Brownrigg Papers.

that this is what she thought Ballard wished to hear: “what can I say more[?] if I ever have spoken hastily that which I should not I hope you will for give me for I hope god has[.] I am humbled enough all reddey hear among strangers without one living to whom I have the least shadow of a claim upon[.]”

Having said this, however, I think one should also recognize that when she uses the word “humbled” she deploys it not in the active sense of learning humility, but rather in the passive sense of being cast down. This of course fits with the prideful tenor of her whole letter – it is hardly humble to threaten to expose Ballard and Boyd, nor to lay claim to her children’s right to manumission, while the line “if I am a servant there is something due me better than my present situation” certainly implies that she challenged rather than accepted her humble[d] status. Furthermore, as it is reasonable to draw a connection from the *privilege* of her literacy to her ‘privileged’ background and from her role as ‘fancy maid’ to a possibility of a ‘mixed-race’ background, this too has potential to help situate Virginia and her *text*. One possible reading would be to suggest that she had in fact internalized the racial prejudice of the master culture and taken herself to be a cut above darker skinned slaves, and one could perhaps read the line “if I am a servant there is something due me better than my present situation” as evidence of this, but there seems to me very little else to suggest that this was in fact how Virginia viewed herself even if it were the case for other light skinned slaves.²⁴ Nor should we imagine for a moment that

²⁴ There has been considerable debate over the status that either masters or slaves accorded to ‘mixed-race’ bondspeople, a conversation that is situated as much in contemporary discourses of race as it has been focussed on the history. Following Genovese and Degler conclusions, I would accept that the evidence is remarkably contradictory on this issue and while some masters may have chosen to favour light-skinned slaves as house servants, for others they were an embarrassment, and while some slave communities might have found their presence a disturbing reminder of their masters’ sexual predations, or envied the ‘privileged’ status some masters accorded them, they were nonetheless accepted as equals by most. Genovese, *Jordan*, 429-31; Carl N. Degler, *Neither Black Nor White: Slavery and Race Relations in Brazil and the United States* (New York, 1971), 182-183, 242-244. On the issue of the extent to which light skinned slaves served to highlight the sexual predations of masters and thus to embarrass and trouble them see Patterson, *Death*, 261, while Robert Brent Toplin,

dark complected slaves of 'humble' origins (by which I do not mean to endorse this racialized discourse, but merely to step inside it for a moment), who had neither had a 'privileged' upbringing nor were possessed of any particular *privilege* were not equally capable of angrily, loudly, and proudly disputing their status or their masters' exploitation of them.²⁵ Instead, therefore, I think it is worth considering that if Virginia Boyd was indeed light skinned then this fact would have already had an important impact on her experience of slavery because it would have added to her value as a sexual commodity, and furthermore it would have remained centrally important to her because the children she had already born to Judge Boyd, and the child she carried, were all the more likely to have been light skinned if she were. If

'Between Black and White: Attitudes Toward Southern Mulattoes, 1830-1861', *JSH*, LXV.2, (1979), 186-190 amply demonstrates the way in which both abolitionists and slavery's defenders reacted to these visible reminders of 'inter-racial' sex.

²⁵ One possibly apocryphal, but nonetheless oft quoted and apposite example comes from the testimony of a former Virginia slave, Fannie Berry, who described how a cook named Sukie who was sexually assaulted by her master not only violently resisted his advances by punching him and then pushing his "hindparts" into a pot of near boiling lye, but then, when he sold her in response, went on to challenge potential buyers to view her as a sex object: "Well, few days later he took Sukie off an' sol' her to de nigger trader. An' dey put Sukie on de block, an' de nigger traders 'zamed her an' pinched her an' den dey open her mouf. And stuck dey fingers in to see how her teeth was. Den Sukie got awful mad, and she pult up her dress an' tole ole nigger traders to look an' see if dey could fin' any teef down dere." Fannie Berry, interviewed by Susie Byrd, February 26, 1937, Petersburg, Virginia, WPA Collection, in Perdue *et al*, *Weevils*, 30-50, in Ira Berlin, Marc Favreau, and Steven F. Miller (eds.), *Remembering Slavery: African Americans Talk About Their Personal Experiences Of Slavery And Freedom*, (New York, 1998), 57. This retold story (Fannie Berry did not witness any of this herself, but heard it recounted by her master's coachman who witnessed the scene at the market though not, of course, the attempted rape itself) has itself been retold in many historical texts. Claire Robertson, 'Africa into the Americas: Slavery and Women, the Family, and Gender Division of Labour' in Gaspar, Hine, *Chattel*, focuses on the first part of it and describes the dunking of the master's "hindparts" as "perhaps the most satisfying example" of female resistance to sexual assault [24]. On the other hand Brenda E. Stevenson, 'Gender Convention, Ideals, and Identity among Antebellum Virginia Slave Women', in *ibid.*, draws attention not only to this initial act of resistance, but to Sukie's performance in the slave market which she reads as a demand that "her new buyer see her for what she was, a woman... not just a new work animal whose value could be assessed by looking at its teeth" [172]. This is certainly true, and indeed whilst a trader buying a piece of livestock might examine its vagina in order to assess its reproductive health and therefore potential, such an examination would not (usually) have a sexual component whereas to perform such an examination on a human being could not help but have one, but I would therefore argue that Sukie's suggestion that he look for dentate was more than simply emphasising her humanity; she was also making clear that he was *not* purchasing her sexual availability even if he was buying her body.

this was the case, and given her situation and her experience, how much would she have feared for their future if they were girls, perhaps even if they were boys, as well as for the future of the unborn child she carried, whose sex she could not yet know?²⁶ Certainly, a common fear that slave mothers had for their daughters was that they would become victims of the 'fancy' trade or of their master, and how much greater must this fear have been for someone who had not only been a victim of sexual exploitation herself, but was now to be sold and, potentially, to have her children sold away from her?²⁷

Her children's background is also significant for another reason, however, which is apparent in her arguments that as their master's children freedom was their due. This is important since up until now the factors that I have discussed – 'privilege', rape, sexual vulnerability and exploitation, or the fact that she is to be sold "without even my having an opportunity of choosing for my self" – all testify to a lack of agency, and yet the very existence of her letter is testimony to her albeit limited agency, to her attempts to shape and control her fate and that of her children, attempts which cast her role as 'fancy maid' in a completely different light.

²⁶ As with all issues relating to homosexuality and male on male rape in Antebellum America one can only speculate on this issue since the sources are mute on the subject. Nonetheless, given the numbers of slaves and masters it seems incontrovertible that there must have been both 'inter-racial' homosexuality and 'inter-racial' rape of male slaves by their masters. It does not take a great leap of the imagination, therefore, to suggest that all of the factors that Baptist highlights as making the exploitation of light-complected female slaves' sexual vulnerability fetishistically exciting to the "one-eyed men" would have applied in equal measure to the rape of 'mixed-race' boys to at least some of them. Indeed, if one extends the logic of Baptist's combination of Marx's "commodity fetishism" as applied to slavery whereby a process of "half forgetting" allows capitalists and consumers to wilfully ignore the exploitation of labour in the process of production, and Freud's suggestion that male sexuality and "sexual fetishism" develop out of a process of "half remembering" early sexualized fears and desires, it would seem that the sexual vulnerability of young male slaves might carry even more of the "frisson" Baptist describes. Baptist, "Cuffy", 1623-1624.

²⁷ For a discussion of slave women's fears for the sexual exploitation of their children see, for instance, White, *Woman?* 95-96, 152-153, and Giddings, *When*, 43-45. Nancy Cartwright's testimony regarding Emily Russel is also telling in this respect since, for when she heard that Emily had died whilst en route to New Orleans, she was apparently so relieved that she had been spared her fate, that she thanked God that her daughter had died: "The Lord be Thanked! He has heard my prayers at last!" Quoted in Bancroft, *Trading*, 334 (no citation given).

Certainly, as Deborah Gray White has argued, and Virginia's situation attests, it was "risky... to expect liberation from one's enslavers," for either oneself or one's children, but there were nonetheless enough examples of masters who eventually freed the slaves they sexually exploited and/or their slave children as to make this a possibility which might make it worth being a compliant as opposed to defiant 'fancy maid.'²⁸ Virginia's letter certainly suggests that this was the calculation that she made in spending her "youthfull days... in the service and grattification, of the m[an tha]t now wants me and his children sold." Moreover, that freedom was what she expected to earn for her pains, if not for herself, then at least for her children, is made abundantly clear when she says "I do think in justice [my] children should be set free" and emphasized in her repeated excoriations of the "Old Man" for his inhumanity and lack of honour in being prepared to sell them: "My god is it possible that any free born American would brand his character with such stigma as that[?]" As for herself, although she appears to argue that she expects nothing and wants only the opportunity to work to buy her children's freedom, there is also the line "do you think that after all that has transpired between me and the old Man (I don't call names) that its treating me well to send me off among strangers in my situation to be sold without even my having an opportunity of choosing for my self," which does

²⁸ White, *Woman?*, 36. White's analysis of the sexual exploitation of slave women remains an undeniably significant contribution to this debate, but her comments regarding slave women choosing to 'prostitute' themselves out of a desire for "silk and satins," [35] seems to deny how unfree were the range of 'choices' open to any slave, a point White herself seems to concede just a few pages later when she says "in order to ease the burdens of slavery, they made themselves available" [38]. It is thus surprising that given her awareness of the racial and gender politics that have shaped so much of the evidence she should have made such a judgement based on what appear to be rather uncritical readings of two writers who rarely tire of moralizing, Northup and Chesnut. By failing to acknowledge that both wrote for particular audiences and from particular positions and the fact neither they nor their readerships' moral compasses could accommodate the limited spectrum of 'choice' faced by a slave women – a point that was succinctly expressed by Harriet Jacobs when she commented that "the condition of a slave confuses all principles of morality, and, in fact, renders the practice of them impossible," Jacobs, *Incidents*, 85 – White unfortunately oversimplifies a complex and highly charged issue.

suggest that she expected at the very least to have some say in her future and at most perhaps to be freed.²⁹

Virginia's emphasis on what was owed to her children, and on what she believes her sexual compliance should be worth to her, is also salutary in another sense, since it speaks to the significant point raised by Fox-Genovese regarding gender construction, namely the contrast between a 'male' construction of the feminine and a 'female' one. This is a point she raises in *The Plantation Household*, suggesting that there is a marked difference in the ways that two black champions of African American rights, W.E.B. DuBois and Sojourner Truth, defined womanhood. Where DuBois found he could "never forgive, neither in this world nor the world to come: [slavery's] wanton and continued and persistent insulting of the black womanhood to which it sought and seeks to prostitute its lust," Sojourner Truth's oft cited "ar'n't I a woman" speech does not focus on the sexual, but instead upon the back-breaking toil of agricultural slavery and on the tragedy of having "born thirteen chilern and seen em mos' all sold off into slavery, and when I cried out with a mother's grief, non but Jesus heard – and ar'n't I a woman?" As Fox-Genovese observes, therefore, "Truth and DuBois concur that slavery assaulted the womanhood of slave women, but tellingly they emphasize different aspects of that womanhood: Truth, work and motherhood; DuBois, sexuality."³⁰ For Virginia, then, what appears to be primarily at stake is "work and motherhood," her first concern not whether she

²⁹ The question of the extent to which relationships between masters and slaves were "parasitic" or "symbiotic" has, of course, been widely debated, and I do not intend to review it here; I will simply re-emphasize that within the limited and far from free 'choices' a slavewoman might face, where the 'choice' was between being a compliant or a defiant rape victim, I think the concept of symbiosis is misleading. Instead I would suggest that, like all slaves, women who found themselves the targets of their masters' lust had stark choices to make, and while defiance might sometimes prevent a rape, more often it would just make it more brutal, while compliance would not stop them being raped but at least carried the potential of giving the woman some degree of leverage over other aspects of her life. On this point see, for instance, Gutman, *Family*, 388-393, while Lecaudey, 'Mask', 250-256, is instructive on the problematic nature of the WPA sources on matters sexual.

³⁰ Fox-Genovese, *Household*, 50.

will continue to be the target of either Boyd or a new master's sexual abuse (which she perhaps considered to be her form of 'work') but the fate of her children and what is owed to them.

With these thoughts on agency and gender in mind, then, I would like to return to the question of how one is to read the slaves' letters in ways which acknowledge them as performative *texts* and which seeks to involve them in, rather than appropriate them for, historical analysis. As the foregoing discussion of Virginia Boyd's text, *text* and context has shown, this requires a reading practice that [re]constructs context from textual clues, and then, through a recursive analysis of these two, seeks to situate the letter writer and not just the letter, but bearing in mind the argument of Chapter Five where I proposed that we must recognize that the narrative, performative self of the egodocument is shaped by its emplotment, this also requires that we consider the realms of performance in which these *texts* played out. We must therefore now turn our attention from the individual letters back to the archives (which are themselves another form of egodocument or perhaps more appropriately egonarrative), and consider the ways in which the archivization of letters by the various recipients of slaves' letters reveal the epistolary cultures in which slave letter writers and readers constructed identities for themselves and others.

Before my *text/text* moves on, however, I would like to suggest that we leave Virginia Boyd's not as we found it, as an interesting and thought provoking evidentiary trace/artefact (though it is undeniably both), but rather as a blank sheet of paper at which she stares as she attempts to formulate a letter that will save her family from destruction. But while she faces a void, she does not write from one, and what I hope I have shown is that it is not only possible but also productive to at least partially [re]construct the space in which she formulated her performance, the personal, social, and cultural cues which shaped her *text*, and to do so through a combination of historicism, imagination, and empathy. Furthermore, I would like to suggest that situating her like this makes it possible to consider Virginia's

performative *text* in a way that simply reading her text does not, while positioning ourselves in this way opens possibilities of a productive involvement of her *text* (and those created by other slaves) in an examination of the way in which the epistolary cultures of slavery provided the realms of performance in which slave letter writers and readers constructed identities in the shadow of slavery.

Part Four

The Surveillance of Epistolary Cultures and Cultures of Epistolary Surveillance

Introduction

Archival narratives and the epistolary cultures of slavery

[T]he technical structure of the archiving archive... determines the structure of the archivable content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future. The archivization produces as much as it records the event.

Jacques Derrida, (1995)¹

As we saw in Chapter Two, the vast majority of the slaves' letters survive in archives that were created by their masters, collections which as I suggested served as vehicles for their self-construction as both authoritarian patriarchs and sentimental paternalists. In proposing that that these archives be read as egonarratives, much as the letters themselves may be read as egodocuments, the implication is that when a letter (considered as a performance of self) is entered into a personal or institutional archive this may effectively be seen as a form of emplotment.² Many masters' archives of slaves' letters may thus be understood as representations of their attempts to construct an epistolary culture of surveillance within which slave letter writers were to be the principle agents of discipline, a project in which the collection of documents could itself be of central importance. As such they testify to the extent to which some slaveholders allowed, and indeed facilitated, the development of slaves' own letter exchanges in ways which were carefully bounded by minute and intrusive

¹ Derrida, *Archive*, 17.

² Although the focus of the current discussion is on personal archives created by masters and slaves, this conceptualization of the archive as an identity construct is also profitable for analysing the archival collections created by/for institutions both in the historical past (for instance, the ACS archives), and in the historiographical present (such as the Southern Historical Collection at Chapel Hill). Indeed, since historians' perspectives are necessarily contingent on the form and contents of the institutional archives on which they depend, it is essential to consider why and how particular archival egonarratives come into being. Thus analysing what Eric Ketelaar terms the "semantic genealogy of the archive" is a worthwhile exercise since archivists' practices, both past and present, inevitably limit what is available while also at least suggesting what should be considered as central and what as peripheral, what is memorable and what may be forgotten. This process is discussed with regard to the ACS in Appendix III, while the imperfect creation of the Southern Historical Collection is the focus of Appendix II. For Eric Ketelaar's comments see 'Tacit Narratives: The Meanings of Archives', *Archival Science*, 1.1, (2001), 131.

practices of surveillance, which emphasized slaves' dependency, and which were ultimately self-serving.

Let us not imagine, however, that archives are merely egonarratives; they are also the product of the practices that determined and inhibited their creation. For instance, in comparing the large body of letters that were written to John Hartwell Cocke by George and Lucy Skipwith to the few surviving letters of Thomas and Rynar Jones (which is to contrast letters written to a master at his behest with letters exchanged between a slave and his fugitive wife), one can see the effects of two differing practices of surveillance, one that sought to utilize literate slaves within a disciplinary structure, another that sought to control literacy and letter writing for fear that it empowered slaves to challenge their masters' panoptic ambitions.³ Where the Skipwiths' letter writing therefore served the purpose of extending the focus of Cocke's gaze, the Jones' correspondence, in contrast, had to be conducted in a way that either avoided or disrupted both slaveholder surveillance and that of a wider Southern society that perceived slave literacy and communication to be a threat to their hegemony. As such the extent of the Skipwith series of letters speaks to the power of a master to impel his slaves to write to him whereas the fact that the Jones' archive is incomplete (and indeed the very paucity of archived examples of other letters like them) attests to the inherent risks of a covert correspondence and the danger of holding onto evidence of it.

The following section therefore examines the ways in which archives of slaves' letters may be read as revealing the ways in which the intersection of practices that used slave letter writers as instruments of surveillance and practices that sought to keep them under surveillance together served to create the realms of

³ GS to JHC, 11 May 1847, through 10 November 1850; LS to JHC, 17 August 1854, through 31 May 1864, *DMLSF*, 153-182, 196-263. THJ to RJ, 11 July 1849, through 30 August 1849; RJ to THJ, 10 August 1849, and 23 August 1849, Thomas H. Jones, *The Experience of Thomas H. Jones, who was a Slave for Forty-Three Years*, (Boston, 1862), 37-46, 43, 44-45, (DocSouth, 1995).

performance in which bondspeople staged their identity constructions of both self and other. For if on the one hand slaveowners (and Southern whites in general) found the idea of slave literacy profoundly threatening and saw the possibility that slaves' could construct their own epistolary culture as perhaps the most dangerous way in which they could utilize education, whilst on the other at least a few were permitting slave literacy in order to augment their powers of surveillance, then slave letter writers had to be very careful as to how they crafted their epistolary selves and, indeed, how they represented others in their correspondence.

Furthermore, it argues that reading modern institutional archives (which it must always be remembered are essentially archives *of* archives) in these terms suggests reasons for the all but complete absence of certain types of letter. For instance, while we may be far from surprised that letters which are explicitly critical of masters such as Virginia Boyd's are rare indeed since very few slaves had so little to lose as to be prepared to risk so direct a confrontation, there are also very few examples of the sort of direct and potentially subversive correspondence between bondspeople, or between slaves and ex-slaves, that one might imagine must have taken place and is, indeed, described in other sources.⁴ In part, of course, such an absence may be because of the ways in which the modern archive was itself constructed, but I would also suggest that understanding the ways in which

⁴ See for instance: Anon. to 'Master John', 26 June 1821, Neil Brown Papers, DUKE; Anthony Chase to Jeremiah Hoffman, August 8 1827, in *BIB*, 120-121; Lavinia to 'My Dear Missus' [Phoebe Sarah Lawton?], July 1849, Willingham and Lawton Family papers, SCL.USC.; Susan Austin to 'Dear Mother', July 18 1851, Austin-Twyman Papers, W&M. For examples of the way in which Narrative writers describe epistolary culture and the ways in which it was limited by surveillance see Quincy Adams, *Narrative of the Life of John Quincy Adams, When in Slavery, and Now as a Freeman*, (Harrisburg, 1872), 29-30, (DocSouth, 1999); Henry Clay Bruce, *The New Man: Twenty-Nine Years a Slave. Twenty-Nine Years a Free Man*, (York, 1895), 101, (DocSouth, 1997). For examples and/or mentions of correspondence between slaves and ex-slaves see HN to DN, April 11 1859 through August 15 1859, *ST*, 116-118 (3 items); Moses Grandy, *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy, Late a Slave in the United States of America*, (London, 1843), 42, (DocSouth, 1996); John Clayton to WS, 6 March 1854; W.H. Atkins to WS, 4 August 1854; Nat Ambie to WS, 10 June 1858; Edmund Turner to WS, 1 March, 1858, all in Still, *Underground*, 59, 213-214, 104, 119.

surveillance created and curtailed opportunities is key in that it explains the genealogies of the archives from which modern institutional collections are constructed and so suggests a way of reading (and reading against) the narrative of domination and subordination they almost inevitably construct.⁵ For while the presence of so many letters between slaves and masters testifies to the way in slaves' opportunities for letter writing were in many ways shaped by surveillance, so too does the relative absence of letters between slaves testify to the way in which surveillance forced bondspeople to keep the material evidence of their independent and illicit engagements with epistolary culture concealed; if we are to properly understand the significance of slaves' own epistolary culture then historicizing this absence is essential.

But if such an approach seems somewhat oblique and presumptive, the following section will show why it is nonetheless both worthwhile and valid. This is because as one attempts to make sense of the ways in which slaves' were involved in the epistolary cultures created by their masters, even as they created their own, one encounters a problem that is no doubt common to all attempts to make history of the practices of everyday life, namely the fact that such practices are rarely remarked upon by their practitioners. Indeed, a striking feature of the majority of the letters is that they are only occasionally written in a style that suggests that their authors were self-consciously aware of the exceptional circumstance (as it appears to us) of a slave putting pen to paper; more often they seem completely unselfconscious about it. Similarly, when Narrative writers such as Harriet Jacobs or Thomas Jones wrote about writing, they did so in ways which makes the act of corresponding seem rather mundane and unexceptional.⁶ This is not to suggest that individual letters themselves

⁵ The readers attention is once again drawn to Appendix II for a fuller discussion of how the modern institutional archive is inevitably shaped by both its archivists past and present, but also by an anterior process of archivization that created the archivable material.

⁶ Jones, *Experience*, 37-46, 43, 44-45; Jacobs, *Incidents*, 193-196.

were not made into vitally important treasures by their recipients – the testimony of ex-slaves such as Elizabeth Keckley and Isaac Williams makes it clear that they were – but rather that slaves’ epistolary culture was itself rather more ubiquitous than it might at first appear.⁷ However, its development was bounded by disciplinary strategies on all sides, and it is thus to the ways in which white society sought to keep slaves’ opportunities for education and their engagements with epistolary culture under close surveillance even as a few slaveholders attempted to utilize (literate) slave correspondents to construct epistolary cultures of surveillance that we must now turn our attention.

⁷ Keckley, *Behind*, 25; Isaac Williams, *Aunt Sally: or, The Cross the Way of Freedom. A Narrative of the Slave-life and Purchase of the Mother of Rev. Isaac Williams of Detroit, Michigan*, (Cincinnati, 1858), 175-178, (DocSouth, 2000).

Chapter Eight

“Evolving the spirit we have to fear”:

The Surveillance of Epistolary Cultures

The love of freedom is an inborn sentiment, which the God of nature has planted deep in the heart. Long may it be kept under by the arbitrary institutions of society; but, at the first favorable moment, it springs forth with a power which defies all check. This celestial spark, which fires the breast of the savage, which glows in that of the philosopher, is not extinguished in the bosom of the slave. It may be buried in the embers, but it still lives, and the breath of knowledge kindles it into a flame. Thus we find there never have been slaves in any country, who have not seized the first favorable opportunity to revolt. These, our hewers of wood and drawers of water, possess the power of doing us mischief, and are prompted to it by motives which self-love dictates, which reason justifies. Our sole security, then, consists in their ignorance of this power, and their means of using it – a security which we have lately found is not to be relied on, and which, small as it is, every day diminishes. Every year adds to the number of those who can read and write; and the increase of knowledge is the principal agent in evolving the spirit we have to fear * * * By way of marking the prodigious change which a few years have made among that class of men, compare the late conspiracy with the revolt under Lord Dunmore. In the one case, a few solitary individuals flocked to that standard, under which they were sure to find protection. In the other, they, in a body, of their own accord, combine a plan for asserting their freedom, and rest their safety on success alone. The difference is, that then they sought freedom merely as a good; now they also claim it as a right. * * * Ignorant and illiterate as they yet are, they have maintained a correspondence, which, whether we consider its extent or duration, is truly astonishing.

Judge St. George Tucker, (1800)¹

The ways in which slaveholders' hopes for and fears of an epistolary culture of slavery produced contradictory practices of surveillance are perhaps best exemplified by the inconsistent pronouncements and practices of one man, Judge St. George Tucker, a prominent Virginia jurist whose career at the bar began in 1774 and culminated in his appointment by James Madison as a United States District Court Judge, a post he held from 1813 until 1825. Although like many of his contemporaries in Revolutionary era America, Tucker was never entirely comfortable with slavery, and even produced a pamphlet containing a proposition for

¹ Public letter of St. George Tucker, 1800, in Joshua Coffin, *An Account of Some of the Principal Slave Insurrections, and Others, Which Have Occurred, or Been Attempted, in the United States and Elsewhere, During the Last Two Centuries*, (New York, 1860), 60. [Asterixes in transcription]

its gradual abolition, in 1800 when the public letter given above was published, he was nonetheless master to more than three hundred slaves spread across various Virginian plantations, while he remained a slaveholder throughout his life and also followed the tradition of giving slaves to his children as wedding presents, thus perpetuating the practice.² He may therefore be seen as representative of the planter elite of the Early Republic, a generation of slaveholders who perhaps more than any other self-consciously sought to transform themselves from “austere, rigid patriarch[s]” into “warm, mellow, paternalis[ts],” even as they also sought to not only maintain slavery but also to consolidate their wealth and power based through slaveholding.³

In order to understand how this transformation affected the epistolary cultures of slavery we must consider the situation that elite slaveholders such as Tucker found themselves occupying at the beginning of the nineteenth century, a position which, at the risk of being overly reductive, was shaped by the tension between their discomfort with slavery and their fears of their slaves. On the one hand, they were wedded to an idea of freedom that had informed their revolutionary ideals (which were themselves expressed within the discourse of slavery) and that therefore did not

² Tucker’s analysis of the evils of slavery developed those put forward by Thomas Jefferson in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, which the former’s pamphlet quoted extensively, although it explicitly rejected Jefferson’s plans for colonization as too expensive, proposing instead a system of bound apprenticeships that would have seen African Americans labouring on their masters’ behalves in compensation for the financial losses implicit in abolition, while at the same time preparing them for their futures as free, if second-class, Americans. Tucker’s ideas, along with Jefferson’s, would prove to be significant in the nineteenth century, in that they influenced gradualists such as John Hartwell Cocke, whilst also providing, at least in part, the impetus and inspiration for the ACS. St George Tucker, *A Dissertation on Slavery: With a Proposal for the Gradual Abolition of It in the State of Virginia*, (Philadelphia, 1796), esp. 7-9. See also Phillip Hamilton, ‘Revolutionary Principles and Family Loyalties: Slavery’s Transformation in the St. George Tucker Household of Early National Virginia’, *WMQ*, 3.LV.4, (1998), 531-556, for a discussion of Tucker’s life and the way in which he came to reconcile his antislavery instincts with his ownership of slaves which usefully situates the Tucker families’ development of a paternalist practice of slaveholding within the larger framework of a Southern discourse that transformed from Revolutionary idealism in the Early National era into southern nationalism by the time of the Missouri crisis.

³ Morgan, *Counterpoint*, 273-296 *passim*.

sit well with their slaveholding; indeed, the opening remarks of Tucker's letter could equally well have been written two or three decades earlier as a preamble to a Revolutionary text: "The love of freedom is an inborn sentiment, which the God of nature has planted deep in the heart. Long may it be kept under by the arbitrary institutions of society; but, at the first favorable moment, it springs forth with a power which defies all check." On the other, they were also haunted by the spectre of slave rebelliousness. For men of Tucker's generation this may in part have been a response to their memories of British attempts to incite slaves to revolt against their masters, as Tucker's reference to "the revolt under Lord Dunmore" reveals, but it was also the consequence of ongoing slave rebelliousness, "the late conspiracy" under Gabriel Prosser being neither the first nor the last time southern whites would feel threatened by the presence among them of so many slaves.

Underlying such fears, however, was the fact that their bondspeople were less and less socio-culturally isolated Africans whose very isolation and dis-location from the land of their birth (surely the most the most profound expression of Patterson's "natal alienation")⁴ played into their masters' attempts to keep them in thrall, and more and more acculturated African Americans whose contacts with the burgeoning population of free blacks, along with the development of 'biracial' antislavery sentiment, all combined to make slaveholding an increasingly insecure institution: "[e]very year adds to the number of those who can read and write; and the increase of knowledge is the principal agent in evolving the spirit we have to fear." Thus, even as the first set of concerns prompted men like Tucker to attempt to ameliorate slavery, or at the very least to construct an ideological defence for slaveholding, the dangers posed by an increasingly acculturated slave population and their social and

⁴ Patterson, *Death*, 5.

cultural links with the ever increasing population of free blacks made it essential to make slavery more secure.⁵

Moreover, and as Tucker made explicit, the danger of rebellion would surely only be compounded were slaves afforded opportunities for an education, let alone for developing their own epistolary culture: "Ignorant and illiterate as they yet are, they have maintained a correspondence, which, whether we consider its extent or duration, is truly astonishing." And yet as we have seen slave literacy and the possibility of corresponding with slaves also seemed to offer at least a partial solution to the first problem, perhaps even to the second, for although literate slaves might be dangerous, under close supervision and with careful cultivation they could also be utilised as agents of discipline whose letters would allow masters to distance themselves from the day to day lives of their bondspeople, including, from such unpleasantness as administering punishments. At the same time, slave letter writers made it possible for masters to at least imagine that their surveillance of their bondspeople extended right into the heart of the black community. Thus the fact that Tucker himself permitted 'privileged' slaves an education and corresponded with them should not necessarily be seen as hypocrisy, but rather as demonstrating the ways in which such slaveholders utilised slave letter writers to not only facilitate surveillance but also to domesticate slavery, as can be seen in the following letter from the manager of the Tucker's Williamsburg townhouse, a slave named Phill Anthony who the Judge had chosen to educate in spite of his own advice.⁶

⁵ Between 1790 and 1810 the free black population of the United States tripled from just under 60,000 to over 180,000, and the total number of slaves nearly doubled from around 700,000 to more than 1,200,000. Furthermore, while over this period the ratio of African-born to American-born slaves remained fairly constant at around 1 in 5, just thirty years earlier in the 1760s, at the beginning of the Revolutionary era, African-born slaves had made up more than a third of the slave population, whilst in the decade following the ending of Atlantic trade this ratio would fall even further to about 1 in 8 in a total enslaved population of more than one and half million. Gomez, *Exchanging*, 22-23.

⁶ While Hamilton agrees that the Tucker families' willingness to allow Phill Anthony and then Robert Edmonson to be educated was a means of domestication, he adds that their use of literate bondspeople as managers may have derived from St. George's upbringing in Barbados, where slave literacy was far

Sept. 14 1807⁷

[St. George Tucker]

I received my good master's letter of the 4th and will endeavor to have every part of it complied with. Judy's youngest Child has been sick but is getting better. Several of servants have had ague and fever but are now about. Aleck is better but never left town. I recd the timber to do the house on this day week and have the promise of a workman to begin it tomorrow. I have had the house whitewashed throughout and hope Ben will put it in good order for your reception.

With the timber I recd a box of loaf sugar, two barrels of brown, a bag of Coffee and a bundle of books accompanied by a letter from Mr Waddy saying there was no such wine to be had as you wanted and that he should wait your further directions respecting it. Miss Bowdoin has preserved some peaches for Mistress by Mrs Peachy waits for those in the garden which are not yet ripe. The former has been ill for several days past, and is still very sick. She desired me to send her love to you all.

Robin will have tomattus but the weather has been so unfavourable that his muskmelons have failed. The old woman has pickled what cucumbers she could get.

I recd the leather some time since...⁸ and Robin has made up the people's shoes. The garden has been much injured by the dry weather which has destroyed most of the Cabbages.

Mr and Mrs Saunders desire their love and respect most particularly to you and Mistress and all Mr Coalter's family.⁹

more widespread than on the American mainland. While this second conclusion is interesting and certainly calls for further comparative research, Hamilton somewhat undermines it when he observes Tucker *only* educated Anthony and Edmonson; if Tucker was mimicking Barbadian slavery where "slave literacy was common" why restrict education to these two? Certainly, others of the Tucker family's slaves did eventually acquire the skill and were permitted to correspond with their masters, but given Judge St. George Tucker's extensive estates surely a network of educated slaves would have been of greatest utility, and yet so far as we know he only educated these two, both of whom worked in the most easily controlled environment – a townhouse in Williamsburg. I would therefore suggest that this choice does not signal any nonchalance on Tucker's part but rather speaks to his concerns about the unsupervised spread of education amongst the slaves, a point which his 1800 letter makes clear. Hamilton, 'Revolutionary', 548.

⁷ PA to StGT, 14 September 1807, *ST*, 8-9.

⁸ The phrase "the leather some time since and Robin has made up" appears to have been duplicated in the transcription of the copy of this letter in *ST*, suggesting a copyist's error, which may be Blassingame's or may derive from his source, Mrs George Coleman, *Virginia Silhouettes*, (Richmond, 1934). For ease of comprehension I have omitted it above, but in the transcription in *ST* this entire sentence reads "I recd the leather some time since and Robin has made up *the leather some time since and Robin has made up* the people's shoes" [emphasis added].

⁹ The Coalters were the Tuckers' daughter Frances and son in law John Coalter, and it appears that Frances Tucker Coalter was instrumental in a process Phillip Hamilton describes as the "domestication of slavery" in the Coalter and Tucker households, a sentimental process by which she insisted that "certain slaves be brought into the family circle." A part of this strategy involved making her own correspondence with her parents a mechanism for transmitting news about her slaves for the benefit of their friends and family that remained in the Tucker household, as well as sending her own

Please offer my love and that of my fellowservants to Mistress and Mrs Coalter.
With grate ful respect I remain my dear master's

dutiful servant

Phill Anthony

But if this letter epitomizes the emergent culture of epistolary surveillance by which some masters overcame their fears of slaves' epistolary culture and/or sought to construct epistolary cultures of surveillance which utilised slaves as their prime disciplinary agents (and amongst the surviving slaves letters it stands as the prototypical example of correspondence of this type), such micro-cultures developed within the confines of far more extensive societal practices of surveillance that sought to regulate and restrict African American literacy and education, and in this regard the sentiments Tucker expressed in his letter of 1800 must have struck a familiar chord with his readers. As early as 1740, for instance, amongst the various laws enacted by the South Carolina legislature in response to the Stono rebellion was one that declared that "having... slaves taught to write, or suffering them to be employed in writing, may be attended with great inconveniences" and so ruled that "all and every person or persons whatsoever, who shall hereafter teach, or cause any slave or slaves to be taught, to write, or shall use or employ any slave as a scribe in any manner of writing whatsoever, hereafter taught to write... shall, for every such offense, forfeit the sum of one hundred pounds current money."¹⁰

fond messages to the bondspeople she had grown up with. Thus, a letter to her father dated 27 January 1804 includes the following sentiment: "Do give my love to all the servants my good old Granny particularly. Tell Isabel her child is very well." Moreover, Frances seems to have begun a family tradition of including such news and sentiments in correspondence, as Hamilton argues: "By the following year, news about slaves" (note "about" rather than messages from them) "took up the better part of some of her letters. At roughly the same time, other women in the family began to include in their notes and letters similar expressions of fondness for their slaves." Frances Tucker Coalter to Judge St. George Tucker, 27 January 1804; Frances Tucker Coalter to Lelia Carter Tucker, 11 April 1805; Lelia Carter Tucker to Frances Tucker Coalter, 12 December 1808[?]; Polly Coalter Tucker to Judge St. George Tucker, March 1811; Frances Lelia Coalter to Frances and John Coalter, 10, 31 July 1813, cited in Phillip Hamilton, 'Revolutionary', 546, n78-80.

¹⁰ Paul Finkelman (ed.), *State Slavery Statutes*, (Microfiche: Frederick, 1989), in Williams, *Self-Taught*, 207. For transcriptions of all the relevant legislation, see *ibid.*, 203-213. Cf. Peter H. Wood,

Sixty years later, in 1800, the same year as Tucker was holding forth on the dangers of the literate slave, a second law was passed, this time asserting that “it shall not be lawful for any number of slaves, free negroes, mulattoes, or mestizoes, *even in company with white persons*, to meet together *for the purpose of* MENTAL INSTRUCTION, either before the rising of the sun, or after the going down of the same,”¹¹ while in 1819 the Virginia General Assembly declared:

all meetings or assemblages of slaves, or free negroes or mulattoes mixing and associating with such slaves at any *meeting-house* or houses, &c., in the night; or at any SCHOOL OR SCHOOLS *for teaching them* READING OR WRITING, *either in the day or night*, under whatsoever pretext, shall be deemed and considered an UNLAWFUL ASSEMBLY[.]¹²

What is notable about these nineteenth-century laws is that in contrast to the 1740 legislation they do not in fact outlaw the teaching of slaves to read and write, but rather seek to control their access to education, a fine distinction no doubt, but one which is nonetheless essential, and in a state-by-state review of legislation that actually outlawed the teaching of slaves to read and write Janet Cornelius found that by the 1850s only four – North and South Carolina, Georgia, and Virginia – still had such specific statutes in their slave codes. By contrast, the majority had laws which aimed at preventing meetings and assemblies for the purpose of “mental instruction,” although these applied not to individual plantations or households, but rather to the relationships between them, while in any case, as she puts it, “slaveowners tended to disregard any laws which seemed to interfere with their management of their own slaves, preferring to think of their plantations as kingdoms in themselves.”¹³

Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion, (New York, 1996; 1974), 323-326.

¹¹ Finkelman, *Statutes*, in Williams, *Self-Taught*, 207.

¹² William Goodell, *The American Slave Code in Theory and Practice: Its Distinctive Features Shown by Its Statutes, Judicial Decisions, and Illustrative Facts*, (New York, 1853), 321, in *ibid.*, 208-209.

¹³ Janet Cornelius, “‘We Slipped and Learned to Read’: Slave Accounts of the Literacy Process, 1830-1865”, *Phylon*, XLIV.3, (1983), 173-174, n7.

Cornelius' analysis does require some qualification, however, for where she tends to focus on "plantations" and "planters" I would suggest that slaves' literacy was perceived as much more threatening in urban settings. Indeed, in the rural south slaves' ability to move around and assemble for "mental instruction" was theoretically limited via the mechanisms of the patrol and the pass system, but in towns and cities such control was far more difficult to achieve; it was surely these African Americans, slave and free, that the laws were intended to govern. Such an analysis also suggests why the four states she identifies, each of which contained large urban centres with significant intermingling of the free black and slave populations, generally passed stricter laws to govern slave literacy and education than the less urbanized states of the interior. Even in these seaboard states, however, the emphasis was still more upon control than outright prohibition, as can be seen in the official responses to the two instances of slave rebelliousness which nineteenth-century southerners found most terrifying, the Denmark Vesey Conspiracy of 1822 and the Nat Turner Rebellion of 1831. For they reveal that what concerned most southern legislators (many of whom, but by no means all, were slaveholders) was not African American education *per se* but their untrammelled access to it, a problem that was most prevalent not in the rural south of the plantation but in urban centres where slave and free lived cheek by jowl and where literacy and literate communication were most difficult to regulate.

For example, in the aftermath of the Vesey Conspiracy Governor Thomas Bennett made a direct connection between the literacy of one of Vesey's supposed lieutenants, Monday Gell, and his leadership role in the alleged conspiracy.¹⁴ Gell's

¹⁴ A recent intervention in the historiography of the Vesey conspiracy, Michael P. Johnson's 'Denmark Vesey and His Co-Conspirators', *WMQ*, 3.LVIII.4, (2001), 915-976, offers a radical re-reading of the events of 1822 in which he argues that historians have interpreted the trial record too literally. Rather than evidence of conspiracy, he suggests, the "witnesses' testimony discloses glimpses of ways that reading and rumors transmuted white orthodoxies into black heresies" [915]. He then goes on to propose that while literate blacks such as Vesey and the slave Monday Gell were

skill at reading and writing, argued Bennett, had afforded him, “an extraordinary and dangerous influence over his fellows,” and having been “[p]ermitted by his owner to occupy a house in the central part of the city...” he

was afforded hourly opportunities for the exercise of his skill on those who were attracted to his shop by business or favor.... Materials were abundantly furnished in the seditious pamphlets brought into the State by equally culpable incendiaries, while the speeches of the oppositionists in Congress to the admission of Missouri gave a serious and imposing effect to his machinations.¹⁵

Looking more closely at this comment, however, it becomes apparent that for Bennett literacy was not the sole reason why Monday had become so rebellious, even if it was the reason he came to be a rebel leader. Instead, the problem was a failure of supervision and surveillance in that Gell had only been able to turn his workshop into a virtual archive of subversive and dissenting material because his independence was “permitted by his master.” The appropriate legislative response was therefore to pass ordinances to prevent assemblies of either free and enslaved African Americans, to enforce a strict regime of surveillance, and to ensure that blacks, of whatever status, were deprived of any unsupervised access to education.¹⁶

certainly avid consumers of any literature that pertained to slave insurrections and to events in Haiti, and although they certainly took vicarious pleasure in the deeds of insurgent slaves and enjoyed discussing such issues with others, both slave and free, what transformed Gell’s “reading and discussion group” into what the Charleston Court interpreted as a rebellious conspiracy was not Vesey’s firebrand preaching, but “the cycle of rumor” that amplified “the shocking talk circulating among black Charlestonians... into ‘the most horrible catastrophe’ that had ever threatened South Carolina... If black men discussed the news, were they plotting to slaughter whites? If they talked about insurrection, were they joining it? If they speculated about an uprising, were they preparing for it?... Rather than evidence of insurrection, witnesses’ testimony documented the heresies widespread among black Charlestonians: that blacks hated both slavery and whites, that slaves should be free, that blacks should be equal to whites” [967]. Whether his conclusions are accurate or not is too complex a debate to engage with here, but from the point of view of the current argument what is notable about Johnson’s approach is that it clearly highlights how profoundly white southerners feared black literacy; in such a context whether in 1822 such fears were grounded in an actual conspiracy or were merely chimerical nightmares that fed on the cycle of paranoid rumour described by Johnson is a moot point.

¹⁵ *The Norfolk City and Portsmouth Herald*, 30 August 1822, in Woodson, *Education*, 158.

¹⁶ Robert S. Starobin (ed.), *Denmark Vesey: The Slave Conspiracy of 1822*, (Englewood Cliffs, 1970), 40-53; Cornelius, “Title”, 30.

It is also important to keep in mind the way that knowledge of the Atlantic World itself made readings of such incendiary material yet more potent a threat. Vesey himself had been brought to America via Santo Domingo, (it is unclear whether he was born in West Africa or on the Caribbean island of St. Thomas) and thus could speak about this beacon of slave rebelliousness from direct experience. Moreover, during his time on Santo Domingo he had become literate in French, a skill he allegedly put to good use in planning the rebellion, and one of the many accusations levelled at him was that he was guilty of writing two letters requesting military aid from Haiti. One of these was reportedly directed to a general in the Haitian military via his brother, a ship's steward, whilst the other was allegedly addressed directly to President Bowyer and supposedly detailed the plan and called on Haiti to lend direct assistance to the insurgents.¹⁷ Between literate slaves and freedmen such as Gell and Vesey, then, slaveholders needed to fear not only conspiracies at home but even supposedly treasonous alliances that were facilitated by an epistolary culture that was out of control; just as Tucker had predicted, unfettered literacy not only fired the love of liberty but also facilitated its expression and organisation into open acts of rebellion.

So too may the response to the Nat Turner Rebellion be seen to operate within this same discourse, as is made clear in the following extract from a letter written by Virginia Governor John Floyd to his counterpart, James Hamilton of South Carolina:

....

I am fully persuaded that the spirit of insubordination which has, and still manifests itself in Virginia, had its origin among and emanated from the Yankee population among us, but especially Yankee pedlers and traders.

Their course has been by no means a direct one, they began first by making them religious; their conversations were of that character, telling the blacks God was no

¹⁷ John Oliver Killens (ed.), *The Trial Record of Denmark Vesey*, (Boston, 1970), 42-3, 46, 51, 58-9, 62, 68-71, 72, 117, 160-1, in Walter C. Rucker, "'I Will Gather All Nations': Resistance, Culture, and Pan-African Collaboration in Denmark Vesey's South Carolina", *JNH*, LXXVI.2, (2001), 139.

respector of persons; the black man was as good as the white; that all men were born free and equal; that they can not serve two masters, that the white people rebelled against England to obtain freedom, so have the blacks the right to do.

In the meantime, I am sure without any purpose of this kind, the preachers especially Northern, were very assiduous in operation upon the population. Day and night they were at work and religion became and is the fashion of the times. Finally our females, and of the most respectable, were persuaded that it was piety to teach negroes to read and write, to the end that they might read the scriptures. Many of them became tutoresses in Sunday Schools and pious [sic] distributors of tracts from the New York Society.

At this point more active operations commenced, our magistrates and laws became more inactive; large assemblies of negroes were suffered to take place for religious purposes. Then commenced the efforts of the black preachers. Often from the pulpits these pamphlets and papers were read, followed by the incendiary publications of Walker, Garrison and Knapp of Boston.... I feel fully justified to myself, in believing the Northern incendiaries, tracts, Sunday Schools, religion, and reading and writing has accomplished this evil.

18
....

Nor were such fears entirely imaginary and amongst the evidence that was compiled against Turner and other conspirators was a letter from a white servant named Williamson Mann to a black slave, Ben Lee, which made quite explicit the dangerous correlation between slaves' literacy, their developing epistolary culture and the way in which it enabled them and their free black and white co-conspirators to avoid surveillance, to plot and to rebel:

Chesterfield County, August 29 1831¹⁹

My old fellow Ben –

You will tell or acquaint every servant in Richmond and adjoining countys they all must be in strict readiness, that this occurrence will go throug Virginia with the slaves and whites if there had never been an association – a visiting with free and slaves this would never of been. They are put up by the free about their liberation. I've wrote to Norfolk, Amelia, Nottoway and to sevel other countys to different slaves bob and bill Miller Bowler john ferguson – and sevel other free fellows been at Dr. Crumps – and a great many gentlemens servants how they must act in getting their liberation they must set afire to the city beginning at Shokoe Hill then going through east west north south Set fire to the bridges they are about to break out in Goochland and in Mecklenburg and

¹⁸ John Floyd, Governor of Virginia, to James Hamilton, Governor of South Carolina, 19 November 1831, in Charles H. Ambler, *Life and Diary of John Floyd* (Richmond, 1918), in James Hugo Johnston, *Race Relations in Virginia & Miscegenation in the South, 1776-1860*, (Amherst, 1970), 138-139

¹⁹ Williamson Mann to Ben Lee, 29 August 1831, in James Hugo Johnston, 'The Participation of White Men in Virginia Negro Insurrections', *JNH*, XVI.2, (1931) 163.

several other countys very shortly. now their is a barber here in this place – tells that a methodist of the name edmonds has put a great many servants up to how they should do and act by setting fire to this town. I do wish they may succeed by so doing we poor whites can get work as well as slaves or collord. this fellow edmonds the methodist says that judge T. F. – is no friend to the free and your Richmond free associates that your master Watkins Lee brockenberry Johnson Taylor of Norfolk and several other noble delegates is bitterly against them all – servants says that billy hickman has just put him up how to do to revenge the whites – edmonds says so you all ought to get revenge –

every white in this place is sceared except myself and a few others this methodist has put up a great many slaves in this place what to do I can tell you so push on boys push on

Your friend Williamson Mann

Moreover, just as the analysis of the Vesey conspiracy had been informed by events in Haiti, so too was Turner's rebellion reinterpreted in the context of events that appeared to speak to the destabilisation of slavery throughout the Atlantic World. Reading back and forth between slave rebelliousness in their own society and events in Jamaica, for instance, southern slaveholders found disturbing parallels between 1831 and the so-called "Baptist War" of 1831-1832, a slave rebellion that was blamed upon a combination of antislavery pamphleteering, slave education, and missionary evangelism; that, at least in American analyses, the British decision to put an end to West Indian slavery a year later was understood as the direct consequence of this insurgency could only heighten their alarm.²⁰ Reinterpreting American events in the light of such an example made it easy to connect the incendiary calls for black rebellion in *Walker's Appeal*, published in 1829, to the literate Nat Turner's religiously inspired revolt of 1831, a connection that also took in the Baptists' missionary efforts to educate slaves so that they could seek their own salvation in the bible, an interpretation that clearly sits well with Floyd's analysis of events in Virginia.²¹

²⁰ Cornelius, "'Title'", 31-34.

²¹ David Walker, *Walker's Appeal, in Four Articles; Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in Particular, and Very Expressly, to Those of the United States of America, Written in Boston, State of Massachusetts, September 28, 1829*, (Boston, 1830). Southern fears that *Appeal* was being read by slaves were not unfounded, and there is good evidence that it was being circulated amongst them: in 1830 Edward Smith, a white steward on a brig out of Boston named

The direct consequences of the events of 1831, then, were statutes that prohibited illicit education of slaves as well as assemblies and preaching, with Virginia and Alabama passing new anti-literacy laws which not only outlawed teaching slaves to read but also giving them books, while in 1834 South Carolina renewed its statutes against slave education and Virginia passed legislation to forbid African Americans, slave or free, from preaching.²² We should not imagine that such legislation was informed solely by fear of conspiracies, however; as Woodson has argued such laws should also be seen as responses to more generalized fears that enslaved and free African Americans, particularly those in urban centres, were becoming “generally enlightened” and that this was leading to precisely the problems identified by Tucker, namely a consciousness of the injustice of their unfreedom and consequent demands for recognition of their rights.²³

But we should also bear in mind that whatever reasons southern legislators’ had for passing such laws, no master was ever tried for educating their slaves. Thus while Genovese may be correct in asserting that “most slaveholders obeyed these laws because they thought them wise, not because they expected punishment of violators,” I would suggest that they did not expect to be punished because the laws were never intended to prevent them from choosing to educate their own slaves if they should so wished.²⁴ Nor were they meant to stop them from corresponding with their bondspeople, allowing them to correspond with each other or requiring them to

Colombo, was arrested in Charleston on a charge of distributing the pamphlet. Questioned by the Captain of the Guard, Smith confessed and admitted that the day before the *Colombo* had left Boston he had been approached by a well-dressed African American man and asked if he would take a package of the pamphlets and distribute them “to any negroes he had a mind to, or that he met, [and] that he must do it privately and not let any white person know anything about it.” Smith was found guilty of “falsely and maliciously contriving to disturb the peace and security of this State and to move a sedition among the Slaves of the people of this state”, for which he was fined \$1000 and sentenced to one year in prison. William H. Pease and Jane H. Pease, ‘Walker’s Appeal Comes to Charleston: A Note and Documents’, *JNH*, LIX.3, (1974), 287-292.

²² Cornelius, “‘Title’”, 32-33. Finkelman, *Statutes*, in Williams, *Self-Taught*, 203, 208-209.

²³ Woodson, *Education*, 159-160.

²⁴ Genovese, *Jordan*, 41.

write reports on their, their fellows, or even their overseers' conduct. The law merely sought to ensure that such education as masters saw fit to bestow on 'privileged' slaves, and such engagements with epistolary culture that they permitted them, remained exceptional 'privileges' rather than uncontrolled opportunities.

In terms of their significance for slaves' epistolary culture I would also suggest that enumerating the number of states that promulgated prohibitive as opposed to proscriptive legislation is rather to miss the point. This is because these laws were not the practical, day to day means by which slave education was controlled – traditional means of violence and intimidation achieved that end – while slaveholders' policing strategies derived their strength not from legal sanction but from the very power to govern slave communities as "kingdoms" that Cornelius ascribes to them, a fact that she herself concedes when she points to the number of WPA testimonies that describe slaves' fears of violent punishment were they to be found reading or writing.²⁵ Instead, they may be more productively interpreted as symptoms of white southerners' intense unease over bondpeople's education which

²⁵ Cornelius, "Slipped", 173-174. The most striking and shocking illustration of the fact that extralegal violence was, as ever, the primary mechanism by which slaveholders sought to control their slaves, whether they were controlling their literacy or extracting their labour, comes from the testimony of Toneya Stewart, a black educator and actress who narrated the radio show *Remembering Slavery*. Introducing the first episode, she presented the following testimony: "When I was a little girl about five or six years old, I used to sit on the garret, the front porch... [listening] to my Papa Dallas. He was blind and had these ugly scars around his eyes. One day I asked Papa Dallas what had happened to his eyes. 'Well daughter,' he answered, 'when I was might young, just about your age, I used to steal away under a big oak tree and I tried to learn my alphabets so that I could learn to read my Bible. But one day the overseer caught me and he drug me up to the plantation and he called out for all the field hands. And he turned to 'em and said, 'Let this be a lesson to all of you darkies. You ain't got no right to learn to read!' And then, daughter, he whooped me. And daughter, as if that wasn't enough, he turned around and burned my eyes out.'" Toneya Stewart, "Remembering Slavery", in Ira Berlin, Marc Favreau, and Steven F. Miller (eds.), *Remembering Slavery: African Americans Talk About Their Personal Experiences Of Slavery And Freedom*, (New York, 1998), 280. Cf. WPA testimony of Doc Daniel Dowdy, born a slave in Georgia in 1856, who recalled that "[t]he first time you was caught trying to read or write, you was whipped with a cow-hide, the next time with a cat-o-nine-tails and the third time they cut the first jint offen your forefinger." Doc Daniel Dowdy, interviewer's name not recorded, interviewed in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, no date, in AS, 1.VII, 78, in Cornelius, "Slipped", 174.

stemmed from the connections they drew between literacy, conspiracy, and rebellion and resulted in the development of increasingly extensive and intrusive strategies of surveillance.

But if legal sanction and extralegal action thus limited slaves' legitimate opportunities for education and forced those who were not 'privileged' by their masters and yet were determined to become literate to find illicit ways to do so, this also had the effect of making it essential to keep the material culture of reading secret.²⁶ As such this strongly suggests that the archival narrative of the event of slaves' engagements with epistolary culture must be lacking and that we should not necessarily accept that the imbalance in the archive of slaves' letters between the wealth of correspondence that was initiated or facilitated by masters and the few surviving letters between slaves is actually representative of the reality. Rather, it

²⁶ Examples of the ways in which slaves managed to steal an education abound in ex-slave testimony, and indeed Olney counts the "record of barriers against literacy and the overwhelming difficulties in learning to read and write" amongst the tropes that make up the "'Master Plan for Slave Narratives.'" But beyond such well known examples as that of Frederick Douglass persuading poor white children to show him how to write letters in exchange for scraps of food, there are many other instances of slaves persuading white children to teach them the rudiments. John Sella Martin, for example, was so skilled at marbles that he became a "banker" for a white boy, Eaton Bass, who "had no stock [of marbles] to begin with... therefore, I insisted on his putting in an equivalent in the way of service to me, which service was to teach me my alphabet." Similarly, in a WPA interview, Mandy Jones, born a slave in Mississippi, recalled that "De way de cullud folks would learn to read was from de white chillun. De white chilluns thought a heap of de cullud chilluns, an' when dey come out o' school wid deir books in deir han's, dey take de culled chilluns, an' slip off somewhere an' learns de cullud chilluns deir lessons, what deir teacher has jes' learned dem." Once learned, such skills could be shared, and Jones also described the "pit schools" that slaves constructed: "Dey would dig pits, an kiver the spot wid bushes an' vines... way out in de woods, dey was woods den, an' de slaves would slip out o' de Quarters at night, an go to dese pits, an some niggah dat had some learnin' would have a school." Olney, "'Born'", 153; Douglass, *Narrative*, 38; John Sella Martin, autobiographical account published in *Good Words*, VIII (1 May 1867), 314-21, VIII (1 June 1867), 393-99, *ST*, 710; Mandy Jones, interviewer's name not recorded, interviewed in Lyman, Mississippi, no date, in *AS*, 1.VIII, 1232. Cf. James L. Bradley, autobiographical account published in *Herald of Freedom*, (7 March 1835), *ST*, 689; G. W. Offley, *A Narrative of the Life and Labors of the Rev. G. W. Offley, A Colored Man, Local Preacher and Missionary*, (Hartford, 1859), 9, (DocDouth, 2000); Charles Alexander, *Battles and Victories of Allen Allensworth, A.M., Ph.D, Lt. Col. Retired U.S. Army*, (Boston, 1914), 8-9, in Williams, *Self-Taught*, 220 n48. For a fuller discussion of the manifold ways in which slaves stole their educations, see *ibid.*, 12-22 *passim*.

testifies to how much bondspeople felt they had to fear from white society's surveillance of their epistolary culture, as is illustrated by the following example in which Harriet Jacobs describes a search of the home of her grandmother (a free woman) in the course of a white mob's ransacking of African American houses and quarters. As Jacobs describes it this was a regular event in the lives of the black population of Edenton, North Carolina, both free and enslaved, but one which took on the character of an annual festival for the poor whites who executed the searches, and which in the early 1830s became increasingly violent and intimidatory as a consequence of Nat Turner's Rebellion. In the course of the search, one of the searchers, who happened to be illiterate, found what appeared to be a letter, resulting in what Jacobs described as an exultant "chorus of voices shouting, 'We's got 'em! We's got 'em! Dis 'ere yaller gal's got letters!'":

There was a general rush for the supposed letter, which, upon examination, proved to be some verses written to me by a friend. In packing away my things, I had overlooked them. When their captain informed them of their contents, they seemed much disappointed. He inquired of me who wrote them. I told him it was one of my friends. 'Can you read them?' he asked. When I told him I could, he swore, and raved, and tore the paper into bits. 'Bring me all your letters!' said he, in a commanding tone. I told him I had none. 'Don't be afraid,' he continued, in an insinuating way. 'Bring them all to me. Nobody shall do you any harm.' Seeing I did not move to obey him, his pleasant tone changed to oaths and threats. 'Who writes to you? half free niggers?' inquired he. I replied, 'O, no; most of my letters are from white people. Some request me to burn them after they are read, and some I destroy without reading.'²⁷

As Jacobs implies, then, even for her, a 'privileged' slave whose master knew she was literate, to be caught with letters was a dangerous thing, and her comment that white correspondents sometimes requested that she burned their letters having read them, whilst clearly calculated to irritate the mob, implies that even some white southerners feared the surveillance of their epistolary exchanges with blacks. As such, Jacobs' experiences illustrate why there are so few surviving examples of slaves' own collections of letters since, even if some slaves chose to keep hold of correspondence, in the face of this type of violent and intrusive surveillance, such

²⁷ Jacobs, *Incidents*, 100-101.

personal archives may well have been destroyed for fear of detection, or indeed discovered and violated as she describes. Without doubt, the glee with which the searchers fell upon the supposed cache of letters suggests that it was exactly the type of evidence they were hoping to find since not only might it justify punishment of an 'uppity Negro', but also because the looting such a personal cache of knowledge could only be humiliating, a combination of intimidatory and sadistic purposes that fits well with Jacobs' implication that the whole occasion was an excuse for terrorizing the black population.

Despite such risks, ex-slave testimony nonetheless provides compelling evidence that archivization was, in fact, a highly significant practice in terms of slaves' self-construction, their construction of knowledge of others, and the maintenance of a concept of family and a possibility for hope despite the separations and isolations produced by slavery. For example, in Isaac Williams' Narrative of his mother Sally's life, epistolary culture plays a significant role in that it is centrally important to his quest for her, and hers for him, and ultimately facilitates his purchase of her freedom and their reunification.²⁸ None of the correspondence is actually included in the text, however, and yet Williams makes the significance of archivization abundantly clear in his emotive description of the way in which a letter Sally received from her cousin, another slave named Mary Ann, became a signifier of the possibility that her hopes for being reunited with her son might one day be realized, and of her joy that he, at least, was no longer a slave but now a free man and a minister:

Neither of them could read it, so Sally stole softly out for Nero. He was as pleased as she was to find that an answer had really been received. It was in Mary Ann's own unpracticed hand, and it was a long time before Nero could decipher it. It was cordial letter, expressing great joy that Sally was alive, and, too wonderful for belief, telling her that her son Isaac had some years before been in Mobile with his master; that he had

²⁸ For Isaac Williams' descriptions of the significance of letter writing over the course of he and his mother's 25 year separation, and indeed to their final reunification, see Williams, *Aunt Sally*, 14-15, 17-18, 133-134, 173-178, 180-181.

sought out his cousin Mary Ann, and inquired earnestly of her for his mother; and that since then he had written her that he had purchased his freedom and was a Methodist minister at the North!

Sally was quite overcome by this sudden and joyful news. Again and again she would have the letter read to her.

....

Sally took the letter... and put it safely by; but sleeping or waking, the thought of it was ever present with her.²⁹

The absent Williams is thus made present for Sally by his embodiment in Mary Ann's text, and this presence is symbolically maintained by keeping the letter both as a physical memorial put "safely by," and also as a cue to memory; as he puts it "the thought of it was ever present," suggesting that the knowledge the letter's materiality, which is to say its *textuality*, was what reassured and pleased his mother.³⁰

Ironically, however, this sense of absent presence is compounded by the fact that the letter is not transcribed into Williams' text, and indeed one cannot even know how long it survived as Sally's memento, an issue which speaks to the problems many slaves must have faced in attempting to keep hold of letters. For if letters were not to be passed illicitly and therefore pose risks to the correspondents merely by their fact of their existence, then permission to correspond with other slaves or to keep the fruits of a correspondence was contingent on owners' goodwill, and in this Williams' description of his mother's decision to show Mary Ann's letter to her mistress, Mrs Cone, is telling:

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 175-178.

³⁰ Cf. Keckley, *Behind*, 25-27, 39-40, which describes the way in which Keckley's mother collected letters from both her husband and then from the young Keckley herself after each had been parted from her by the actions of their owners. As Keckley herself says of them: "[T]he most precious mementoes of my existence are the faded old letters that he wrote, full of love, and always hoping that the future would bring brighter days. In nearly every letter is a message for me. 'Tell my darling little Lizzie,' he writes, 'to be a good girl, and to learn her book. Kiss her for me, and tell her that I will come to see her some day.' Thus he wrote time and again, but he never came. He lived in hope, but died without ever seeing his wife and child." [25]

There was nothing objectionable in her cousin's letter, so the next morning she carried it to her mistress, and while she read it, she said to her in a trembling tone,

"Please missis, if you or Miss Eliza, traveled on de boat as de ladies do, an' would take me with you down to Mobile, I should so like to see Mary Ann!"

"No, Sally, I never travel."

"Well, 'pears like, if you'd let me go some time?"

"No, Sally, you can just give up thinking any thing more about it – it's altogether too far from home."

Sally took the letter, upon which no comment was made, and put it safely by.³¹

Clearly, Sally knew that letters could be "objectionable" and that having shown this one to Mrs Cone, she was lucky to be allowed to keep it; as can be seen from the number of letters between slaves that are to be found in their masters' archives, many slaves were not so fortunate.

Another Narrative which illustrates the effects of surveillance not only on the practice of archivization but also on the content of letters, is that of Thomas Jones and what is particularly interesting about it are his comments upon the two letters "from my wife which I was able to keep," which reveal not only his awareness of the threat of surveillance but also his attempts to subvert it. The letters represent part of a correspondence between the two that took place after she and their three children had fled Wilmington, North Carolina for New York, after the couple got word that her emancipation (Jones had saved money to purchase her) was legally questionable, whilst their children, who would therefore have been born when she was still a slave, were not in fact free and thus that plans were afoot to re-enslave the entire family:

She was to write to me as though she had gone to New York on a visit, intending to come back, and she was to speak of New York as if she did not like it at all. I knew my master would be very angry when he heard she had gone unbeknown to him, and I thought he would demand to see the letters my wife should get friends in New York to write to me for her; and so I made ready to meet and quiet his suspicions, while I was plotting my own escape.... Before I give a narrative of my escape, I will give copies of the letters which passed between me and my wife, while I remained in the land of bondage after her escape. These letters with their post marks, are all in my possession

³¹ *Ibid.*, 177.

and can be examined by any one who may doubt their authenticity, or the fidelity with which they are here given.³²

Jones, then, expected his wife's letters to be intercepted, and so bade her to write as if she would be returning, and beyond what this ruse reveals about the way in which the surveilled could turn surveillance to their advantage by using it to spread disinformation (something that should inform our readings of other slaves' letters), what is also significant is that in Jones' Narrative one can read something more than the fear that their correspondence might be intercepted, in that when he speaks of being able to keep only two letters, he suggests the danger that a larger collection might have posed: were it discovered their whole plan might be revealed and then there would be no chance of a reunion.

Just how dangerous discovery could be is made clear by the consequences that befell Harriet Newby after her letters were found on the dead body of her husband, ex-slave Dangerfield Newby, after he died in John Brown's raid on Harper's ferry. That he carried these three letters into battle is itself a striking act of personal archivization which again demonstrates the ways in which letters came to embody absent others in an era when many African Americans, slave and free, were parted from their loved ones by the interstate slave trade, or by the fact that one escaped slavery by some means whilst others remained behind enslaved, as was the case for the Newbys after Dangerfield had purchased his freedom and then headed

³² Jones, *Experience*, 36-37. The redeployment of such personal archives into the public domain as integral parts of Slave Narratives represents a complex interplay between public and private archival space and praxis, for though to the Jones' this correspondence represented many things – a means to dupe his master as well as a signifier of hope – in his narrative they serve a dual purpose. On the one hand they reveal he and his wife's cunning and the means of their escape, thus performing an important narrative role, but on the other they also serve as authenticating documents, as Jones' comment that "these letters with their post marks, are all in my possession and can be examined by any one who may doubt their authenticity, or the fidelity with which they are here given" makes clear. The private archive of letters made public thus serves as a self-referential guarantee of authenticity, each individual item serving to prove the veracity of the next, and the whole providing a touchstone for the truth of the whole narrative. For a discussion of the significance of letters and other authorizing texts in the Slave Narratives see Stepto, *Veil*, 7-31. Cf. Byerman, 'Mask', 70-80.

North in hopes of finding employment and raising sufficient funds to purchase Harriet and their offspring in due course. Furthermore, Harriet's letters show how much the couple longed to be reunited, and indeed that she was receiving correspondence from him, as can be seen from the following extract:

Brentville, April 22d, 1859.³³

Dear Husband [*Dangerfield Newby*]

I received your letter to-day, and it gives much pleasure to here from you, but was sorry to [hear] of your sickness; hope you may be well when you receive this. I wrote to you several weeks ago, and directed my letter to Bridge Port, but I fear you did not receive it, as you said nothing about it in yours

....

Dear Dangerfield, you cannot imagine how much I want to see you. Com as soon as you can, for nothing would give more pleasure than to see you. It is the grates Comfort that I have in thinking of the promist time when you will be here. Oh, that *bless* hour when I shall see you once more. My baby commenced to crall to-day. Nothing more at present, but remain

Your affectionate wife,

Harriet Newby

There is much here that is striking, not least the reference to letters back and forth across the divide between slavery and freedom, and the implication of just how valuable his letters to her must have been. However, in the present context what is significant is that the consequence of the letters being discovered on his body was that Harriet was made the target of the South's revenge and sold 'down the river'; as Phillip Troutman puts it "these tokens of sentiment, aimed at reuniting them, effected her separation even from his corpse."³⁴

Given such a pervasive culture of surveillance and the tremendous risks that were associated with the discovery of an illicit correspondence, it is thus unsurprising that the following letter is unique within the archive. Written to a North Carolinian slave named Andy by his father, William Smith, who was living as

³³ HN to DN, April 22 1859, *ST*, 117. Cf. HN to DN April 11 1859, and August 15 1859, *ibid.*, 116-118.

³⁴ Troutman, 'Correspondences', 211.

freeman in Ohio, it exemplifies the impact that the dangers posed by surveillance must have had upon the shape of the archive, for though it explicitly speaks to the existence of others like it written by and for bondpeople, it is the only actual example that has survived, an archival event which itself may testify to the failure of its author's intent; since Smith's plan was to arrange for his son to escape, his letters had to pass undetected, and yet the very fact that it has been archived by a slaveholder suggests that in this at least he failed.³⁵ But despite its uniqueness, it may actually represent a type of correspondence which slaves simply could not risk holding on to yet which would have been crucially important, namely letters from fugitive slaves or from free men and women, both black and white, which detailed escape plans:

Cincinnati, April 12, 1842³⁶

Dear Son [Andy]

I received your letter dated Feb 15 and have written in answer immediately.

In answer to your request for assistance, I was unable to get a horse mine has gone blind, mine has gone blind [sic] and entirely unfit to travel. Money is very scarce and I have with difficulty raised \$15 which I send herein enclosed for to bear your expenses, it is all I can get and [...] with what you have got and can get will be enough. I should have sent a friend to aid and assist you along but it is difficult to get one I could trust. If you think you are capable of performing the journey alone you had better under take it[,] if not write me as soon as you can and I will try some other way for your escape[.] If you have any doubt or fear of being detected stay where you are provided you can keep concealed[.] I have procured some free papers which I think will answer the purpose for your protection[.]

³⁵ Frustratingly, though perhaps unsurprisingly, the provenance of this correspondence is as obscure as its author and recipients, since although it is archived as a part of the William Alexander Smith papers at Duke, I have found no records which show whether Smith's slaveowning parents (Smith himself was born in 1843) owned a slave named Andy or one named William. Thus, though one can only speculate as to whether the correspondence was intercepted and the plan foiled, the mention of a Mr Smith who owned William's wife and child would seem to suggest that this is the most convincing reading of the letter's archivization.

³⁶ William Smith to 'Dear Son' [Andy] [addendum to Mr Pemberton], 12 April 1842, William Alexander Smith Papers, DUKE. Two textual features suggest that this a transcript rather than an original: first, the two repeated phrases, "mine has gone blind" and "I have a thought of trying to buy them", seem to be copyist's errors; second, the final sentence after the addendum to Pemberton appears to be written in a different hand, although it may have been scrawled in haste and with a different, rather heavier, pen.

You will get your instructions from Mr Pemberton how you shall conducts[.] The name you are to assume is John Green and the one that raised you Martin Pickitt[?] Mr Pemberton will understand and direct you how you are to act and how you must manage with your money[.] The ten dollars are one of the North Western bank of Virginia and the remaining five are on the State Bank of Indiana[.] This Indiana money you had better keep until you get near Ohio[.]

Keep in good spirits and try to keep your presence of mind and not commit yourself and

[page 2]

always assume a kind of careless and indifferent manner and you will not be half as likely to be suspected[.] I shall leave the rest of the plan for my friend Mr Pemberton to execute[.] you must be guided by his directions[.] I am your affection father

Wm Smith

[addendum]

Dear Sir [*Mr Pemberton*]

I have as you se procured the necessary papers for Andy and 15.00[.] you will please direct him as you think best and circumstances may require[.] Please be as cautious as you can for in that lays the success of the plan[.]

If you can get him out of the immediate neighbour-hood there will not be as danger the rest of the way[.] If Andy should not have money enough please let him have a little and I will send it back immediately[.] If I should fail to get him now I think of coming myself the fall sometime[.] The price of labour is very low and is constantly falling and it is difficult to make much here[.]

Please write me whether Mr Smith designs settling in that country or not and what he intends doing with my wife and child. I have a thought of trying to buy them[.] I have a thought of trying to buy them [sic] but times are so hard at present that will be impossible but if you can put me on any plan to get them please do so for you know best how and if you can't I will come back[.]

[page 3]

If there is any fear or danger of writing letters backwards and forward write me[.] Please do your utmost to secure the escape of Andy and the blessing of a grateful father rest upon you

Wm Smith

P.S. Please make some inquiry about Elijah Clark and let me know where he lives[.] also send your letter to Chickisaw [sic] P.O. Mercer Co. Ohio[.] and ever remain your [svt?]

W S

A Coppie of a letter written by Day to James Pemberton

Given the lack of a satisfactory provenance for this letter many of the questions it suggests are unanswerable. For instance, since Smith is writing to his son Andy and gives a male pseudonym for “the one that raised” him, yet writes to Pemberton about the disposition of his “wife and child” there is the tantalizing possibility that the plan was for her to make her escape disguised as a man, making this the prototype of Ellen and William Craft’s escape from slavery.³⁷ However, given the comments about remaining concealed it would appear that Andy had already made his escape yet needed help with the final leg of the journey to freedom, while Smith’s wife and another child remained in bondage. If so the identity of the “one that raised you” poses an interesting problem – was Smith arranging not only Andy’s escape but that of his stepfather (which might explain the rather impersonal phraseology of “the one that raised you”) or was he perhaps referring to an uncle, friend or half brother? Such questions are unanswerable, yet they do not preclude an analysis of this letter as an example of a significant yet largely unknown and almost entirely un-archived aspect of slaves’ epistolary culture, namely the ways in which, as material *texts* letters could themselves embody the possibility of crossing the line from slavery to freedom. Certainly the Slave Narratives attest to such an epistolary culture, whilst one might also consider the ACS correspondence as performing a similar function, at least symbolically, although clearly in a less transgressive manner.³⁸

³⁷ William Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom; or, the Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery*, (London: William Tweedie, 1860). This famous Narrative describes how the light skinned Ellen Craft disguised herself as a high status white man and treated her husband as her manservant in order to conceal their identities and make their good their escape.

³⁸ Beyond the example from Jones, *Experience*, cited above, two Narrative writers who show how significant a motif letters transgressing the line between slavery and freedom could be are Northup and Jacobs. Northup, whose Narrative tells of his abduction into slavery and eventual rescue, describes how he focused a great deal of his attention on attempting to get a letter sent back to his family in the North in order to get someone to vouch for his free status, a project which was ultimately successful and which, given his description of the lengths he had to go to get the letter sent, reveals much about the ways in which literate slaves and their letters were treated as suspect. In *Incidents*, by contrast, Jacobs’ skilful and cunning manipulation of her master via her faked letters from the North take the transgressive and indeed subversive possibilities of slaves’ epistolary culture to the extreme.

There are also a number of letters from bondspeople to friends or relatives who were free, the majority of which were written by slaves who were about to be sold and requested the recipient to either act as or find a purchaser, and since these were all written with the full knowledge and consent of the slave trader, who sometimes would even have acted as amanuensis or postmaster, they represent yet another facet of the surveillance and manipulation of slaves' epistolary culture.³⁹ In terms of communiqués that aimed to facilitate escape, however, this letter – and perhaps too the Newby correspondence – are the only examples from outwith the Narratives of which I am aware, and though Smith's is not itself a letter written by a slave, it clearly speaks to an ongoing correspondence in both directions, making reference to other letters sent and received and even revealing an awareness of the threat of surveillance: "If there is any fear or danger of writing letters backwards and forward write me[.]" It is thus not a great stretch of the imagination to suggest that this letter, and the letter from Andy to which it refers represent a much larger body of correspondence that was simply too dangerous for its recipients to preserve.

If, however, the policing of literacy, the surveillance of literate slaves, and the consequent concealment of elements of their epistolary culture have all resulted in the conspicuous archival absence of certain types of correspondence, these disciplinary practices have nonetheless also had an inverse effect that is apparent in the presence of letters that were written for or sent to illiterate bondspeople, since where opportunities for education were limited this created a situation in which masters' themselves could take their surveillance of slaves' epistolary culture to the extreme by interposing themselves as interlocutors. For slaves, of course, this must

See Northup, *Twelve*, 25, 73-74, 184, 194, 230-235, 275-281, 289-298, 305, 320, 325, 330; Jacobs, *Incidents*, 193-196.

³⁹ See, for instance: Sargry Brown to Moses Brown, 27 October 1840, in *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 16 September 1841; Susan & Ersey to Beverley Tucker, 24 October 1842; Emily Russel to Nancy Cartwright, 22 January 1850, in *Monthly Illustrations of American Slavery*, 1 May 1850; Marie Perkins to Richard Perkins, 8 October 1852; *ST*, 46-47, 13-14, 87, 96-97.

have had a significant impact on what they felt able to write, but in terms of archivization, such a practice of surveillance has had the perverse effect of having led to the survival of rather more letters between slaves than otherwise might have been the case; indeed, save for a few letters between bondspeople that are transcribed in Narratives (and by no means all of these), slave correspondence in which masters were involved as either scribes or readers are virtually the only letters between bondspeople or from slaves to ex-slaves that have found their way into modern institutional archives. While this may afford us a only a limited view in which, as Stamppp put it, the “ubiquitous white... stands forever between slave and historian,” it has at least had the effect of affording the historian some limited access to slave-to-slave correspondence, while reading them as *texts* that testify to their particular situation and mechanisms of production and/or reception is very useful for what they can tell us about this intimate practice of surveillance.⁴⁰ By way of illustration it is therefore worthwhile examining a number of these dictated and read letters since each of the following examples (two of which appear to have been archived by masters, and two which were archived by Union Army clerks), reveal different aspects of the way in which slaves’ engagements with epistolary culture were more or less subject to and shaped by surveillance, and the tactics they used in response to these limitations.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Stamppp, ‘Rebels’, 369.

⁴¹ That some of the letters sent and received by former slaves who joined the Union army now reside in the National Archives as a result of their archivization by army clerks suggests that many may have gone undelivered. This certainly does not apply to all – Aaron Oats, for instance, submitted the letters he received to the office of the United States Secretary of War when he sought the army’s assistance in liberating her – but other letters such as those sent to the soldier named Andy by his wife, a slave named Ann and her amanuensis James Carney, have been archived without such evidence as to their provenance, and may well have never reached their intended recipient, a detail that adds a tragic subtext to the archival narrative. Lucrethia to Aaron Oats, 22 December 1864; Jerry Smith to Aaron Utz [Oats], 10 January 1865; Ann to Andy, [endorsement James A Carney], 19 January 1864; *BME*, 693-694, 686-687.

The first of these examples consists in a letter dated 7 April 1863, which was written by a literate slave named Jefferson McCauly. Although the exact location from which he was writing is illegible, since McCauly gives his address as a military camp it seems likely that he had accompanied one of his master's sons when he enlisted in the Confederate army, probably the "Master Ned" his letter refers to, a use of the diminutive which perhaps suggests the familiarity of an older slave with a younger master, which in turn leads one to infer that McCauly, whose letter is addressed "My dear Master," may have been writing to Ned's father. Unfortunately there is little contextual detail beyond this since the envelope has not survived and it is unclear when the letter was originally archived and by whom – it is now a part of the Gilder Lehrman collection in New York where it is filed as an individual item – but I would speculate that it was probably originally kept either by McCauley's master or by Mr McDonald, the owner of McCauley's wife. Whoever kept it and why they did so aside, what is particularly striking about this letter is that it demonstrates how a slave such as McCauly was not only able to work within the limitations imposed by the surveillance that was explicit in his dependence upon his master and upon McDonald as readers, but also that he was very conscious of the process by which his messages to his family and theirs to him would be conveyed:

Camp[,] 8th [...] Regt⁴²

[...] April 7th 1863

My dear Master

I have not seen either Armstead or Aaron neither William nor Larkin but I believe that they are in Tullahoma. I ought to have written to you sooner and would have done so but this is the first chance I have had to write since I came back.

I got here on Thursday and on a Monday night about 12 o'clock I was taken with a very heavy heaving and a [sawing?] off of the bowels and I think I had a something like the Cholera Morbus, and I was very sick [...] of the week, but I never taken my bed until Saturday night when the Master gave me a pass to see Mr Mo. L. [Davidson?]. The people out there paid very strict attention to me and now I feel right well only very weak. I got back into camp this morning about 10 o'clock.

⁴² Jefferson McCauly to My dear Master, April 7 1863, GLC-NY.

Harriet, my wife. I hope would be very much interested for I am getting right smart now.

Mother, I am in hopes you all are well.

Harriet, my wife, I am in hopes you are well, I am in hopes than my children is

[page 2]

well – and I am in hopes that all the rest of the family connexions is well. Remember what I told you on a Monday evening when I left home, teach my little children the Lord's prayer. My dear wife I would have written you before now but I knew it would trouble you almost near to death to hear that I was sick.

I now write to you I am getting well. I am in hopes my dear Wife, you will continue to try to be a Christian and remember what I have oft times told you I think it is your duty and every other womans what says you are Christians to fall upon your knees every night, for I am trying to live a Christian every day – and by the grace of God I expects to live a Christian.

This is one thing I charge you in particular teach my little children the Lord's prayer.

Now to Brother Alfred McCauly howdy and to all the rest howdy. That I am now well and am in hopes that you all will not be interested about me for I am well. Now Harriet I am in hopes that you will try to have this letter answered. I believe that your master or your mistress or some of the children will write a letter for you.

[page 3]

I know that you are bashful in talking but I want you to pick up faith enough to have this letter answered for it would be a great deal of satisfaction to receive a letter from you to answer hows you and the the children is.

If you don[']t know enough the necessary words to put in a letter ask your Master or your Mistress me to write a letter about you[.] I believe they will do it.

Master I wish you would read this letter to mother and the children around you to give them satisfaction – I would wish that both the families you and Mr McDonald ~~wou~~ write to me so that I may know how you are.

Master after reading this letter I wish that you would please give it to Mr McDonald.

Mr McDonald it would be a great accommodation to me if you would read this letter cheerfully to my wife and give her satisfaction and comfort about me.

After reading it I hope you will answer it.

I am your obdt Servent

Jefferson McCauly

Tell Miss Mary that Master Ned is well [...] as far as I hear – and that he is getting along mighty well.

Though addressed to his master and containing information that seems to have been required by him (which, it should be noted, itself pertains to the surveillance of other slaves), for McCauly the primary purpose of this letter was clearly to convey messages for his family, the achievement of which was contingent on the intercession of masters, both his own and his wife's. It is therefore very

interesting to note how determined he is to ensure that the message was passed on in the appropriate manner, even going so far as to specify a voice: "read this letter cheerfully to my wife." As well as this concern with the presentation of his message, however, the instructions he issues to his wife about how to get a letter written to him are also notable in that he not only suggests who she should ask to write for her – "I believe that your master or your mistress or some of the children will write a letter for you" – but also proposes the interesting alternative of getting a letter written about her, a suggestion that might be understood as a slave's attempt to make use of the culture of surveillance to which bondspeople were subject, and which indeed itself puts him to use. In this context, however, it is also worth remarking on the fact that McCauly's wife was perhaps less confident about or comfortable with such a process than he was and it is possible that his own literacy had made him less conscious of the problems his wife would have faced in replying to him and thus dismissive of the impediments she faced than he might otherwise have been.

Whatever her reluctance signifies, what is remarkable about this letter is what it reveals about the dynamics of communication in a world of enforced dependence and surveillance, and in this sense, while it is certainly important to recognize that in texts such as this "the ubiquitous white" presence does indeed have a powerful influence on shaping what could be said and what can be read, it should also be acknowledged that this is not necessarily a weakness in terms of their utility as source material; instead it is a factor which allows us to examine the way in which slaves negotiated with their owners in order to construct a space for their own epistolary culture within a system which placed it under minute surveillance. That the boundaries of this space, and what could be said and done within it, were in large part determined by owners and not by slaves must be taken as a given, but as the

McCauly letter reveals, slaves negotiated these limits carefully and did what they could to make the most of them.⁴³

With this in mind, then, I would turn to the second example of this type of correspondence via white interlocutor, which is a letter that was written for a slave, since the intercession of a master as amanuensis as opposed to as reader clearly has very different effects of power and thus represents a different set of negotiations. The letter is from a Texas slave woman named Fannie to her husband Norfleet Perry, who, like James McCauly, was separated from his family by the Civil War. Based on a chirographic comparison, Randolph Campbell and Donald Pickens suggest that it is likely that her master's teenage daughter Louisa wrote it for her, and what Fannie's letter reveals is the way in which engaging a sympathetic amanuensis, even were they white and a slaveowner's daughter, could make all the difference when communicating with loved ones, as the contrast between it and the letter from Lucrethia that follows it demonstrates.⁴⁴ This is not, of course, to imply that Fannie's letter was not affected by surveillance, nor to represent a romanticized view of the relationship between slaves and their owners' children, but rather to suggest that the effects of the young mistress' gaze (if Louisa was indeed Fannie's amanuensis) were likely to have been as much transformative as they would have been prohibitive or proscriptive; indeed, although one should be wary of reading this letter through the stereotype of the romantic teenage girl, it nonetheless reads as if Fannie's scribe

⁴³ For a thorough and interesting discussion of the ways in which slaves negotiated these boundaries see Troutman, 'Correspondences', 211-243.

⁴⁴ Campbell and Pickens' conclusion is based not only on the handwriting, but also on the circumstantial evidence that Louisa was living at Spring Hill at the time the letter was written. While I accept their conclusion as the most probable explanation, their speculation that since the sentiments are so "well-expressed" Louisa must have been doing more than simply acting as scribe are questionable, for while it is not unreasonable to assume that the seventeen year old daughter of an elite planter might have enjoyed the romance and potential for tragedy in Fannie and Norfleet's story and thus felt it appropriate to transform Fannie's *text* into something more melodramatic, it is also possible that Fannie was quite capable of expressing herself in this way, or else that she deliberately sought Louisa's help in formulating her sentiments into an appropriately romantic love-letter. Campbell, Pickens, "'Husband'", 363.

became caught up in the romance and melodrama of writing a letter for lovers parted by war:

Spring Hill. Dec. 28th 1862.⁴⁵

My Dear Husband [*Norfleet Perry*],

I would be mighty glad to see you and I wish you would write back here and let me know how you are getting on. I am doing tolerable well and have enjoyed very good health since you left. I haven't forgot you nor I never will forget you as long as the world stands, even if you forget me. My love is just as great as it was the first night I married you, and I hope it will be so with you. My heart and love is pinned to your breast, and I hope your is to mine. If I never see you again, I hope to meet you in Heaven. There is no time day or night but what I am studying about you. I haven't had a letter from you in some time. I am very anxious to hear from you. I heard once that you were sick but I heard afterwards that you had got well. I hope that your health will be good hereafter. Master gave us three days Christmas. I wish you could have been here to enjoy it with me for I did not enjoy myself much because you were not here. I went up to Miss Ock's to a candy stew last Friday night, I wish you could have been here with me. I know I would have enjoyed myself so much better. Mother, Father, Grandmama, Brothers & Sisters say Howdy and they hope you will do well. Be sure to answer this soon for I am always glad to hear from you. I hope it will not be long before you can come home.

Your loving wife

Fannie

"If you love me like I love you no knife can cut our love into"

In terms of the effects of surveillance by the amanuensis, then, whilst it is impossible to say with any certainty where Fannie's message ends and the influence of her scribe begins, it nonetheless important to recognize that even in such a sympathetic transcription as this the effects of the imbalance of power between observer and observed where both are participants in the process of writing must be significant. Under such circumstances it is also worth considering who the scribe is actually writing for; their subjects or themselves. Indeed, since this letter was ultimately archived by the Person family (perhaps because it never reached Norfleet, who absconded for about a year around the time it was sent, or perhaps because his master, who was the actual recipient of the letter, kept it having read it to his slave), we are again confronted with important issues with regard to the semantic genealogy

⁴⁵ Fannie to Norfleet Perry, 28 December 1862; Louisa Perry to Theophilus Perry, 3 January 1860, Person Family Papers, DUKE.

of the archive and the tacit narratives it constructs: since this letter so perfectly signifies the model of the sympathetic and sentimental paternalistic relationship between a slave and their young mistress, this act of archivization is itself a striking example of the way in which the emplotment of such *texts* within slaveowners' collections served to construct an archival egonarrative that memorialised ideal master/slave relations.⁴⁶

In terms of the difference between the effects of a sympathetic and a hostile amanuensis, however, and the way in which the impact of the latter's surveillance could be coercive, manipulative, and intrusive, it is worth comparing Fannie's letter to the following message received by Aaron Oats from his wife Lucrethia whom he had left behind in Kentucky when he absconded from his owner's farm and joined the Union army:

December the 22 [18]64⁴⁷

Dar husban [*Aaron Oats*]

I receive your letter dated December the 7 64 which gave me much pleasure to hear that you ar alive and well[.] I mus state that I and mother and the children ar all well hopping that these few lines may still find you well still[.] I am at home and far as well as usial[.] I shall content myself and wait for the time to come as you thought you could not get a ferlough[.] I must state that there is another one was Born sence you left but I suppose you heard of it[.] if you have not I will tell you hername is effis tell[.] [pood?] as they call him can run half as fast as you can and fat asever[.] your sisters ar all well[.] Johns mother states that, she wish John would right and if he wont Right when you right again send all the perticklers About him whether he is live ordead.

N.B you stated in your letter that you sent me too letters and your picture but I never receivd either[.]

so I must conclude my short letter by saing that I send my love to you all and keep the Best part for your self

so no more till death

Lucrethia

⁴⁶ For details of Norfleet's absence and of his and his master's explanations for it see Campbell, Pickens, "'Husband'", 362-363.

⁴⁷ Lucrethia to Aaron Oats, 22 December 1864, *BME*, 693.

[Enclosure]

[Union, Kentucky, 10 January 1865]⁴⁸

When your letter came to hand it was red and answerd and when I went to put it in the office ther was another at hand Equal as insolent as the other so I concluded to send you a few lines upon my own responsibilty and, not to write any more with out you will have some Respect for me[.] ~~if you don't it they will not be red or answered~~ my darkes has too much Sence to be foold in such away[.] ther has been agreat menny woman and children have left and returned back again[.] one instant in my nabohood[,] Henry corben's many you nod her[,] dan had encoyd her and six children over in cincinnati out on walnut hill and there she and three children starved to death[,] the oldest that could travel came home and got his master to bring them home to keep them from starvation and too of the youngest had ate flesh of ther fingers[.] NB Lucretia dont belong to you[.] I only gave her to you for wife dureing good behaviour and you have violated your plede, my darkes olways tells me when they want to leve me[.] they will tell me[.] they say that if they ar to be deliberated they want ot don honorable.

this lettere was rote the 22 of December but taken it back to answer you my self I neglected tp put it in the office till now this being the 10 of January 1865[.] But my darkes is as well now as they were then and doing better than when you was hear[.] now, they are wated on[.] when you was hear they had you to wait on[.]

so no more

[Jerry Smith]

That Lucrethia's message came to Oats in the form of a letter containing an overtly hostile enclosure from his former owner and her master, Jerry Smith, reveals how invasive and overwhelming the surveillance of slaves epistolary culture could be, but hostility aside, it is important to bear in mind that the affects Fannie's amanuensis had on her letter are potentially no less great even if they were motivated by quite different sentiments. As such, the textual effects of Smith's combination of his message with Lucrethia's demonstrates how significantly slaveowners' surveillance circumscribed the possibilities for illiterate slaves' engagement with epistolary culture by rendering them dependent upon white interlocutors, no matter whether that meant an unsympathetic and controlling scribe such as Smith, or one as sympathetic as Fannie's appears to have been.

⁴⁸ Jerry Smith to Aaron Utz [Oats], 10 January 1865, *ibid.*, 693-694.

Whatever the similarities between Fannie's and Lucrethia's power relationships with their respective amanuenses, however, the differences between their letters demonstrate how crucial this relationship was, since while Fannie's scribe seems to have achieved a certain emotional (if vicarious) involvement in the romantic project of writing a love letter, Lucrethia's message speaks of an entirely different kind of involvement, one in which the amanuensis appropriates and symbolically takes hostage the letter writer's sentiments (just as he literally holds her and her children hostage) in order to create a text that conveys his power, and the extent of his surveillance. As such, however honest a rendering he offers of Lucrethia's sentiments, the inclusion of the text of her message within the *text* of his correspondence is much more about him than it is about her; indeed, the more convincing he can make his transcription of her words, the stronger his own case becomes, and the more Oats must fear for his chances of ever seeing or hearing from his wife and children again, a fear that is echoed and reinforced, perhaps even encouraged in the closing sentiment of her letter, "so no more till death," and in the finality of Smith's closure, "so no more."

Moreover, Smith's letter contains other clues about the effects of surveillance on the existence of archival material, because as we can see he clearly interposes himself between Lucrethia and Oats in almost every possible way: when Lucrethia comments that "you stated in your letter that you sent me too letters and your picture but I never receivd either" this must have at least set her husband to question whether it was Smith who was in fact failing to deliver them, since what is apparent from his text is that it is he who must act as postmaster. Furthermore, Smith's statement that he would "not to write any more with out you will have some Respect for me" as well as the excised "if you don[']t they will not be red or answered" demonstrates just how arbitrary and yet absolute was his power to permit or prevent the correspondence. As such it is certainly quite imaginable that other letters from Oats never reached his wife because Smith was not disposed to allow the communication through, and that they have never reached the archive because Smith destroyed them.

With regard to the mechanism by which slaves' letters were delivered it is also important to keep in mind that as well as depending upon their owners to pass letters on, bondspeople were also dependent upon a postal service that was staffed by whites whose attitude towards handling letters between slaves might be far from sympathetic. For instance, in his Narrative Henry Clay Bruce describes how the replacement of a postmaster named James Long for embezzling government money "was a blessing to some extent, to the Colored people who received mail through that office, for he [Long] would not give them their mail, but held it and delivered it to their masters[.] Our family had no trouble in this respect, for our master would bring our letters unopened and deliver them without question."⁴⁹ Others, he implies, were clearly not so fortunate, a suggestion that makes clear just how careful slave letter writers had to be in governing those aspects of their correspondence over which they had any control. Indeed, whether they were illiterate or literate, slaves had to be cunning in who they chose as intermediaries and ingenious as to how they used them, and the final example of the way in which interlocutory others interceded in slaves' epistolary culture offers an alternative view which details how surveillance might be avoided, although it nonetheless still attests to the threat that it posed. Moreover, what it makes very clear is that the archive of slaves' letters must be lacking and that the almost complete absence of this kind of correspondence, where a sympathetic third party from outwith the master/slave dynamic serves as an intermediary creates a tacit narrative in which the strategy of white surveillance virtually obscures all evidence of slaves' tactical responses.

Addressed to a former slave named Andy who had enlisted in a Missouri regiment, this letter was written for his illiterate wife Ann by a sympathetic neighbour named James Carney (we do not know whether he was free or slave, black or white), who not only served as her amanuensis but also received mail for her and

⁴⁹ Henry Clay Bruce, *The New Man: Twenty-Nine Years a Slave. Twenty-Nine Years a Free Man*, (York, 1895), 101.

read letters to her. However, while Ann's master, a Mr Hogsett, tolerated this correspondence, he was also determined not to allow it to take place outside of his surveillance. Ann and Carney therefore had to resort to some subterfuge to ensure that the full extent of her correspondence with Andy was not discovered, and as the letter makes clear, Andy had to be cautioned not to allow either the content or the frequency of his letters to tip off Hogsett:

Paris Mo[,] Jany 19 1864⁵⁰

My Dear Husband [Andy],

I r'ecd your letter dated Jan'y 9th also one dated Jany 1st but have got no one till now to write for me. You do not know how bad I amtreated. They are treating me worse and worse every day. Our child cries for you. Send me some money as soon as you can for me and my child are almost naked. My cloth is yet in the loom and there is no telling when it will be out. Do not send any of your letters to Hogsett especially those having money in them as Hogsett will keep the money. George Coombs went to Hannibal soon after you did so I did not get that money from him. Do the best you can and do not fret too much for me for it wont be long before I will be free and then all we make will be ours.

Your affectionate wife

Ann

P.S. Sind our little girl a string of beads in your next lettr to remember you by.

Ann

[Endorsement]

Andy if you send me any more letters for your wife do not send them in care of any one. Just direct them plainly to James A Carney Paris Monroe County Mo. Do not write too often[.] Once a month will be plenty and when you do write do not write as though you had recd any letters for if you do your wife will not be so apt to get them. Hogsett has forbid her coming to my houe so we cannot read them to her privately. If you send any money I will give that to her myself.

Yrs &c

Jas A Carney

What each of these examples illustrate, then, is that not only was the epistolary culture of literate slaves subject to and curtailed by surveillance in that they had to assume that letters would be intercepted or else had to rely upon amanuenses, but so too were bondspeople's opportunities for self-archivization in

⁵⁰ Ann to Andy, [endorsement James A Carney], 19 January 1864, *BME*, 686-687.

that a collection of letters could testify to forbidden literacy or reveal illicit epistolary exchanges, relationships and plans. As such, they suggest that the surveillance of slaves in general, and specifically of educational opportunity and epistolary culture must all have had significant consequences for the shape and contents of the overall archive of slaves' letters and thus for our ability to historicize the event of slave letter writing. Moreover, such an analysis of the genealogy of the archive demonstrates the profitability of reading against egonarratives of domination and subordination by acknowledging not only what is present but also seeking to identify what is absent and why. Such an engagement demonstrates that in fact there must have been far more communication between slaves than we can access, and that while fear of surveillance must certainly have prevented many from being able to either gain an education or send and receive letters, it must also have made it very dangerous for those enslaved people that could to create their own archives.

In acknowledging this problematic situation, however, I am not suggesting that we should resort to imagination to fill the void. Rather, my intention is to highlight that what remains accessible has been in large part predetermined by the relations of power between master and slave and thus that if the archive of slaves' letters reads as a narrative of domination, this does not preclude the possibility that the very practices of domination that shaped it have actually served to obscure a rather more extensive and subversive epistolary culture than might at first have seemed apparent. Nonetheless, we must continue with a history that recalls the event as it has been archived, even as we keep in mind that the genealogy of the archive of slaves' letters testifies to practices of surveillance that were direct responses to slaveowners' fears of slaves' epistolary culture, fears that as we have seen had reasonable foundations in fact. Notwithstanding the danger that slaveowners saw in a literate enslaved population, however, a few of them nonetheless also viewed slave literacy and letter writing as an opportunity to augment their disciplinary power and thus attempted construct epistolary cultures of surveillance which included, and even created literate slaves. In so doing these masters sought, with varying degrees of success, to not only further appropriate the bodies of their slaves by turning them

into agents of discipline and surveillance of other bondspeople, but also to make them the objects of discipline and surveillance themselves. Moreover, as the next chapter reveals, this epistolary culture of surveillance may be clearly identified within the semantic genealogy of the archive, especially given the fact that archivization was itself an intrinsic element of this disciplinary structure, and it is thus to this interaction of surveillance and slave's epistolary culture that we should now turn our attention.

Chapter Nine

"Dear Master": Cultures of Epistolary Surveillance

Montie Viedieo Sept 3^d 1852

Dear Master [*Charles Colcock Jones*]

Mr Shepard brought me your letter last week, and I heard it read to me with great pleasure, and much obliged to you Master for your kind notice of me. I always feel satisfied that I have a good Shear of your Love and Confidance, but whenever I See you take the time & trouble, to write me your Servant a kind & and I may say fatherly letter, it makes me feel more like crying with love and grattitude for So kind a master than anything else, and always feel it in my heart to say, I will try and be a better Servant than ever[.]

....

Catoe, (1852)¹

Given the extent to which masters, as well as white southern society in general, feared black literacy and attempted to limit, if not prohibit, slaves' engagements with epistolary culture, it is perhaps surprising that any slaveholders were prepared to allow their slaves access to education and permission to write letters or else the means to have letters written and sent for them. And yet as the foregoing chapters have argued, more than a few were prepared at the very least to facilitate the correspondence of illiterate slaves, and at the most to provide certain 'privileged' bondspeople with an education and to not only allow them a degree of independence in conducting their own correspondence, but even to have corresponded with them themselves. As we have seen, this apparent paradox may in part be explained as one of many tactics within an overall strategy which sought to domesticate slavery by conceptualizing it within a discourse of sentiment, but if this was effectively the manifestation of their desire to ameliorate the institution, or at least to construct a

¹ Catoe [sic] to CCJ, 3 September 1852, *BIB*, 49-50. Though Jones used the more conventional spelling, Thomas Shepard, Catoe's amanuensis, consistently spelled Catoe name with an 'e' and while one cannot discern whether this alternate spelling was Shepard's error or Catoe's decision, since there is no way to tell whether Catoe was sufficiently literate to at least make a choice as to how his name should be written, given the power of names and naming I have chosen to reflect the spelling used in the letters from Catoe rather than that used by his master.

defensible self-image for themselves, and if this in turn encouraged some to create epistolary and thus archival opportunities for their slaves to recognize, reciprocate and signify their owners' sentimentality, this is still only a partial explanation. For as the following chapter demonstrates, while much of the correspondence that took place between bondspeople and their masters may well have produced *texts* that fit this paradigm, most masters that corresponded with their slaves were motivated by practical as well as ideological agendas.

Such a complex of motivations certainly seems to have been behind Charles Colcock Jones' decision to correspond with his slaves. Master to a considerable number of bondspeople, from early on in his career as a slaveholder Jones made a conscious attempt to govern his plantations in a way that he at least considered to be humane and efficient and so utilised male slaves as well as white men to oversee and manage "his people" and his business during his frequent absences, managing them in turn via a correspondence that thus served both practical and ideological purposes.² In terms of the latter, it is clear that the letters that he chose to preserve were shaped by the paternalist discourse, as can be seen in the extract from Catoe's letter to Jones quoted above, as well as in the single surviving example of his own correspondence with his slaves, and that he thought enough of his own letter to a keep a copy for himself is itself a telling act of archival self-employment.³ Dated 28 January 1851, it certainly reads as the letter of a model paternalist replete as it is with solicitous expressions of fatherly concern over a recent illness suffered by Catoe. Furthermore, having assured his slave that he was "very sorry – & very much troubled to hear how sick you have been," Jones went on to stress how important it was that Catoe should look after himself as he convalesced and in this passage the letter reveals just how much Catoe was being 'privileged' by Jones, for he tells him

² Clarke, *Dwelling*, 117, 147-148, 255-256.

³ CCJ to Catoe, 28 January 1851. *Cf.*, Catoe to CCJ, 3 March 1851; Andrew to CCJ, 10 September 1852; *ibid.*, 43-55.

that he had arranged for him to be provided with some “good flannel” from which he should have made a number of shirts “*coming down well over the hips, with long sleeves & two or three pairs of drawers of the same: & so keep yourself warmly clad.*” And he continued in this vein:

....

You must pay attention to what you eat: Have your victuals cooked regularly and carefully. Make what arrangements you think best for this. Eat at the same times every day and do not exercise in the dew or wet. Carry your cloak and umbrella, and have you good fires – and be sure to sleep warm. If you fancy anything special to eat, Mr. Shepard will see that you have it.

....

Be careful of the cold damp & changeable weather in February or March. Mr. Shepard will point out one of the men, who can look after things when you are not able to be as much about as you wish, and he can take directions from you and make his report to you.

....⁴

Thus, as a man who prided himself on his humane treatment of his bondspeople and regarded himself as a paternalist *par excellence*, for Jones to leave for posterity such a letter was to leave a record of his beneficence and humanity, whilst keeping letters such as Catoe’s that explicitly reciprocated his paternalism with expressions of filial devotion must have comfortingly affirmed this self-image.

Yet the correspondence between Jones and his slaves was more than simply a means by which he could document his beneficence; it was also a disciplinary strategy by which he sought to govern his troublesome property in a manner both compassionate and disciplined, a practical agenda that is also apparent in the correspondence of his slaves which detail such issues as the progress of work on damming and draining, the health of the slave community, and their conformity to or indeed their defiance of the regime Jones’ had established. For instance in another letter from 1851 Catoe reports on a number of cases of illness, which while they had a salutary effect on one particularly irreligious slave named Negar, had done nothing

⁴ CCJ to Catoe, 28 January 1851, *ibid.* 44, italics in Starobin’s transcription.

to quell the defiant behaviour of his brother Cash which Catoe blamed upon the bad influence of his wife Phoebeia:⁵

....

Negar has been living very Carelessly and indifferent to his duty as a Christian would not attend prayers, but this Sudden Sickness Seems to have made him think better[.] I have talked to him and I hope hereafter he has made up his mind to do better. As for Cash I am afraid he has given himself up to the old boy, for Since his wife has been with him he appears more petulant and has not only given up going to prayers, but I have several times heard him make use of bad words Whenever he was displeased, & have shamed and talked to him so often, that I have felt it my duty to report him to the church & Mr Law has Cited him before the Next Meeting. Phoebe and I get along So, So. So far as yet, She does her work very well, but there is a strong notion now and then to break out but She knows well Enough how it will be if She does, and I am in hopes she will let her better judgement rule her passions.

....⁶

Moreover, such a practical agenda is also apparent in Jones' own letter, for instance in his establishment of an alternative chain of command which retained and even emphasized Catoe's authority whilst at the same time reserving certain powers to the ever present representative of white power, Thomas Shepard, a plantation owner who possessed a few slaves of his own and fulfilled two all-important roles for his richer neighbour Jones: on the one hand he served as amanuensis when the slaves wrote to their master and as reader when Jones wrote back, thus placing the slaves' correspondence under an intrusive surveillance which ensured that Jones' self-managing bondspople reported honestly; on the other he also provided yet a further level of discipline in that it was he who was the ultimate arbiter of Jones' authority, though it remained the slaves' responsibility to ensure that all ran smoothly. It was thus Shepard who was deputed to appoint a temporary factotum to stand in for Catoe as he convalesced (though he may well have had his choice

⁵ There is again some confusion over the spelling of names with regard to Phoebeia and Cash. In a letter they had dictated (Phoebeia and Cash to Mr Delions [Lyons], 17 March 1857, *BIB*, 57-58), their names are signed as I have spelled them, despite the fact that Jones knew him as Cassius and her as Phoebe. Moreover, although Catoe's letters also refer to his brother by the name of Cash as opposed to Cassius, Phoebeia's name is again spelled as Phoebe.

⁶ Catoe to CCJ, 3 March 1851, *BIB*, 53-55.

directed by Jones), but it was from Catoe that this man would “take directions” and to whom he would report.⁷

As the example of the relationship between Shepard and Catoe demonstrates, therefore, slaves tasked with writing letters to their masters were not only the agents of their practice of epistolary surveillance, but also the objects of surveillance themselves (by which I mean to emphasize both that their correspondence was a form of confessional self-surveillance and that their masters usually appointed men such as Shepard to keep an eye on them); what they wrote in their letters therefore had to conform to both the authoritarian and sentimental expectations of their owners. As such, whilst Blassingame’s suggestion that “only the most indulgent master permitted those blacks he considered his most loyal, contented and trusted servants to write to him,” may be true for some masters that corresponded with their slaves, we should be careful not to assume as he does that because such slaves presented themselves as “relatively satisfied with their status,” and as identifying “with their master’s interests,” as well as constructing their masters as “kindhearted men,” these were genuine sentiments.⁸ Rather, it is important to bear in mind that such ‘privileged’ slaves had to perform as if they were “relatively satisfied” and needed to convince their masters that they were indeed “loyal, contented” and trustworthy because their own security and status depended upon it. So too did their ability to work in the interests of the slave communities they governed, although the extent to which they did this must have entailed a negotiation between what was in the interests of all and what was in their own self-interest, a calculation which no

⁷ The complex relationship between Jones, Catoe, and Shepard and their overlapping approaches to slave management are analysed in Clarke, *Dwelling*, 300-316 *passim*. For other examples of the way in which a master provided his slaves with a white amanuensis who also submitted his own reports yet still left most of the power in the hands of black trustees see the forty five letters written by Henry and/or Moses to William S. Pettigrew (which also contain many messages from other slaves) via the intercession Pettigrew’s neighbour of Malachi White. Lizzy, Moses, and Malica [Malachi] White to WSP, 5 July 1856, through Moses to WSP, 9 October 1858, Pettigrew Papers. Cf. Genovese, *Jordan*, 375.

⁸ *ST*, lxiii.

doubt varied from 'privileged' slave to 'privileged' slave. By the same token, playing to their owners' self-constructions as "kindhearted" men and women was therefore a useful tactic, but it would be dangerous to assume that just because Catoe referred to Jones as "fatherly" he viewed him as such or indeed that Jones' paternalism (in Blassingame's terms, his "indulgence") was much more than a thin veneer for his patriarchal authority.⁹

Moreover, the very fact that such slaves were required to correspond with their masters (and I would stress that there is a difference between being 'required' and being "permitted") means that they had little choice but to stage their epistolary

⁹ As Clarke makes clear, if Jones began his career as a slaveholder with heartfelt reservations about the institution, the depth of "self-deception" [356] that informed his self-image as a paternalist is apparent in the events surrounding the sale of an entire slave family, headed by Cash and Phoebe. His reasoning was that after various incidents of defiance he felt they could no longer be trusted, the final straw being what he interpreted as their complicity in the escape of Jane, their 18 year old daughter, and their refusal to give him any information about her whereabouts. When she was recaptured, therefore, Jones resolved "to dispose of the entire family" and explained this in a letter to his son by stating that while it was "very painful... we have no comfort or confidence in them, and they appear unhappy themselves – no doubt from the trouble they have from time to time occasioned." By refusing to sell them singly, however, he reassured himself of his humanity and paternalism, something he congratulated himself upon after the sale had been finalized, declaring in a letter to his wife Mary that "conscience is better than money." Yet as Clarke concludes, "he appeared completely oblivious to the ways in which he had acted cruelly in the quest for high ideals and money" [356]. Moreover, even his attempt to keep the family together rather predictably floundered, and while they were initially sold to a planter in the upcountry who claimed that he wanted them for his own use, he apparently resold them to a speculator in Savannah who then transported them to New Orleans where they were separated; Jane died of pleurisy on the way. While Jones may have been able to wash his hands of responsibility for this, however, he must have known very well how the trade in slaves worked at a time when prime hands such as Cash and Phoebe's children Cassius, Jr., aged 20, Prime aged 16, Victoria, aged 14 and Lafayette, aged 12, were in such high demand to work cotton and sugar plantations in the southwest, and indeed the fact that he eventually secured the letter that Phoebe and Cash wrote back to a white trader named Lyons in order to archive it in his own collection might be read as evidence of a guilty conscience. It is worth bearing in mind, however, that Phoebe and Cash themselves appear to have had few doubts who to blame, and wrote in their letter that they were "sold for spite," though they added, with no small hint of irony, "though I hope it is for our own good." They included a special message for Catoe, however, which suggests they held him, as much their former master, responsible for their situation: "Mr Delions will please tell Cato that what we have got to throw away now it would furnish your plantation for a season." Clarke, *Dwelling*, 345-361; CCJ to Charles Colcock Jones, Jr., 2 October 1856, CCJ to Mary Jones, 10 December 1856, in *ibid.*, 350, 355. Phoebe and Cash to Mr Delions [Lyons], 17 March 1857, *BIB*, 57-58.

performances of self within the bounds that Blassingame describes: while a successful performance could be very worthwhile, as the 'privileges' Jones provided to Catoe attest, a poor one could be costly, and there are good examples that demonstrate just what slaves could expect to happen should the show prove unconvincing. For instance, in 1851, after a series of disappointments and second chances, John Hartwell Cocke finally removed George Skipwith from his position as driver at Hopewell (he had already been demoted from being overseer in early 1848), and also relocated him, his wife Mary and his youngest son George to a Mississippi plantation owned by his agent, Robert Powell.¹⁰ But what necessitated such a drastic move, or to put it another way, why had George's performance so failed to satisfy his master? He had certainly endeavoured to present Cocke with what he believed was expected of him, writing him regular reports that seem to have been carefully crafted to please. Indeed, it is worth noting that since Cocke appears to have been as obsessive about the regularity with which he received reports as he was compulsive in his archivization of them, George did his best to keep to this schedule, and though

¹⁰ *DMLSF*, 147-152. Like Jones, Cocke could of course justify this punishment in paternalist terms, reasoning that he was getting rid of a destructive and immoral influence who had only served to lead astray the Hopewell slaves. However, as in the case of Phoebe and Cash, this banishment also stands a classic example of the way in which masters utilized their power to dispose of slaves as they saw fit in order to enforce discipline, and although the fact that they were not sold along with the fact he at least allowed George to go with his wife and youngest child might be considered merciful, in so doing he not only separated Mary from other of her children, but also forced her to remain in a relationship with an alcoholic husband who may well have been far from loving: it should be recalled, after all, that George had in fact abandoned this marriage sometime in 1847 to set up house with a younger woman, only returning to Mary when forced to by Cocke. It is also worth noting that in his attempts to restore order after his discovery of the state of his experiment in 1848 Cocke used the threat of sale to force all unwed couples to get married, whilst also selling one young woman who he felt was irredeemably dissolute and immoral. Moreover, when the situation again deteriorated in 1850, Cocke once again resorted to selling those women he felt were beyond redemption, recording in his journal that he had had two of George's daughters sold because they were "incorrigible strumpets" [no citation given], and it is surely worth noting that in Cocke's eyes it was the women who were usually at fault when it came to questions of sexual impropriety. It thus seems that like his friend Charles Colcock Jones, however philanthropic a paternalist Cocke may have imagined himself to be, when his schemes for amelioration and ultimate (if conditional) freedom floundered, he was apt to turn to means of slave management as cruel and inhumane as those of many other less ambitious (or perhaps self-deluding) slaveholders.

a number of his letters contain references to his master chiding him for failing to send his monthly missive it is notable that Cocke's archives reveal that George actually wrote as regularly as he was required to, as he himself emphasized:

....

I am sorry that you complain of not hearing from me once a month[;] I have written to you every month since you went away. it is true that some of my letters was som too or three days after my ushall time but it was not through niglect but I know that I would be able to give you more sattisfacshion about my matters. this letter is a few days behind now but if it was a week later I could give you more satisfaction concerning my crops than I can now. my last letter to you was on the fourth of July and I gave ya an account of my crops at that time.

....¹¹

But if Cocke expected George's monthly letters to be sent and to arrive with clockwork regularity (another example, perhaps, of the way in which he sought to impose a modern regimen of disciplines upon his workers), his slave clearly resented this obsessive demand for precision and indeed made it clear that if Cocke truly wanted to know about progress at Hopewell he would allow George to write when there was something to report. Such a conflict, however, speaks to the difference between Cocke's purposes and George's, for while as a slaveholder Cocke was utilizing his slave as an agent of disciplinary control, as a slave George styled himself a kind of master – note for instance the references to “my crops” – and as such resented his owner's desire for the timing of his missives to be regulated by the calendar and not by the situation.

But such minor disagreements to one side, George nevertheless endeavoured to provide Cocke with the types of report he required. For example, since he no doubt drilled his slave with instructions over how best to manage the farm, George would surely have known that his master was as a strong a believer in the latest agricultural innovations as he was in sexual morality, temperance and religious devotion. It is thus unsurprising to find that he presents Cocke with reports which

¹¹ GS to JHC, 8 August 1848, *ibid.*, 172-173.

were tailored to him in at least this regard, and while his letters are generally mute on morality and religion, they are quite voluble on 'marling' – the practice of digging calcareous matter known as 'marl' into the fields to prevent soil depletion which was at this time still quite a novelty. Indeed of the twenty-two surviving letters from George, twelve mention the subject, sometimes in great (and tedious) detail:¹²

Hopewell[,] December the 26 1847¹³

Sir [*John Hartwell Cocke*]

I wrote to you the 20 of last month and has been no sickness amoung us since I wrote you last[.] frank has put up Brick chimneys to all of the houses in the yard. He is now got a smal Job for mr parker but he will finish it in a few days. Lea and Archa have been hierd out for severl months. I have been imployed all of my Lasure minits in search of the marl and I find it betwenn three and four feet deep[.] the stuff that I am now hauling hav every apearance of lime with a mixture of shells init[.] it is tolerable hard but when it is exposed to the sun it becoms very soft[.] I also have been haulling corn storks into the farm yards[.] I started my plowes to brakeing up grown about a week a go[.] I have killed twenty too of my hogs[.] it made me three thousand weight[.] I hav twenty eight more to kill which I shall kill in a few days if it stays cold a nuf[.] one of the coalts hav died since I wrote to you but he has been lingering a long time. there has been a great storm in the Joining county and it don great damage[.] it blowed down gin houses Dwelling houses killed people and severl mules. give my love to all boath black and white. I remane your servant

George Skipwith

there is nothing like marl to be found on the sandy land[.] I have tried better than five feet but it can be found on the post oak land[.] I do not know whither you reseved my last letter or not but i have written to you reaglar every month[.] let me knoe when you have herd any thing from brother peyton.¹⁴

¹² GS to JHC, 11 May 1847; 8 September 1847; 26 December 1847; 6 May 1848; 4 July 1848; 8 August 1848; 1 September 1848; 2 October 1848; 1 November 1848; 1 December 1848; 12 October 1849; 14 October 1850; 10 November 1850, *ibid.*, 153, 162-163, 166, 169, 171-177, 180-182.

¹³ GS to JHC, 26 December 1847, *ibid.*, 166.

¹⁴ Peyton Skipwith, George's elder brother, and his family were the first slaves whom Cocke emancipated and sent 'back' to Africa where they faced the considerable hardships encountered by all African American émigrés: Peyton's wife Lydia and his daughter Felicia died within the family's first year in Monrovia, while Peyton himself was dogged by ill-health during the first few years, rendering he and his family heavily dependent upon Cocke's charity. Nonetheless within a few years Peyton had established a successful stonemasonry business and his family seem to have recovered from the loss of Lydia and Felicia and achieved a sense of belonging and relative independence, as their letters home attest. Having said this, however, independence from Cocke in fact took generations to achieve and so, as Randall Miller comments, we should perhaps be as wary of the émigrés' expressions of devotion and gratitude to Cocke and his family as we are of those contained in George and Lucy's letters; after all, their letters were not merely descriptions of their situation but requests for ongoing aid. *Ibid.*, 39-57 *passim.*, especially 41-43. The surviving letters from the Liberian Skipwiths, spanning

Yet it is important to note the date on this letter – 26th December 1847 – for it highlights just how much George was leaving out. It will be remembered that this was but a few weeks before Cocke visited Hopewell in the New Year of 1848 and discovered what it had become under George’s supervision – a “plantation brothel” as he put it – a fact that suggests that Cocke was being told about the marl situation so as to avoid informing him of the moral situation. Such obfuscation and misdirection should not come as any great surprise, but the point is that George was writing the letters his master expected to receive and playing to what he rightly believed were his master’s interests. In so doing he was also at least partially fulfilling the complex role that Cocke had laid out for him, and so one should expect to find the reports on slave discipline, farm management, animal husbandry or crop yields that typify this series of letters, but at the same time it is important that we take note of what George chose not to include in his correspondence, and that we recognize that such choices were as much a product of what Cocke wished to read as they were of what George wished to write.

And yet this example also reveals why George’s performance was ultimately ineffectual, because he seems to have failed to recognize how flimsy the epistolary mask could actually be; indeed one wonders just how much George’s apparent alcoholism served to make him a rather less convincing performer than his daughter Lucy would prove to be. For given the fact that he was expecting Cocke’s New Year visit of 1848 and so by the time that he wrote this letter must have realized that the game would shortly be up, it would seem that the situation was truly out of his control.¹⁵ This is certainly the conclusion that Miller reaches, arguing that Cocke had

three generations and a period of over thirty years, number more than fifty, and are all published in *ibid.*, 58-152.

¹⁵ Similar sins of omission were also apparent to Pettigrew in the letters he received from Moses and Henry, though in their case what they tended to conceal was the misbehaviour of others and failures of their own leadership rather than their own vices. As Genovese comments, “no doubt Moses and Henry played down any trouble, both to protect the slaves from further punishment and to put their own

made a poor choice in appointing George to a position of authority, because he was not only an inveterate alcoholic whose protestations that he had “sworn off ardent spirits” ever came to nothing, but also because even “power worked on George like strong drink.” As Miller puts it:¹⁶

George preferred sure power to distant emancipation and indulged his own ‘libidinous and adulterous propensities,’ which, according to Cocke, he ‘vainly’ expected to conceal by ‘practicing on the fears & criminal interests of the others, thus entering into a league of vice against themselves.’¹⁷

In the present context, however, the essential point is that it was not merely his involvement of other Hopewell slaves in his deceptions that were in vain; it was also his attempt to utilize letter writing as a means to deceive his master, because while this might have worked in the short run, in the longer term he was not only bound to be found out, but had also provided Cocke with the means to call his bluff. For letters written by such apparently trustworthy, loyal and ‘privileged’ slaves as George were more than just reports; they were the archivable material from which slaveowners like Cocke could create what were effectively confessional bodies of knowledge about their slaves which could then be held against them should their promises and accounts turn out to be false. As such one can still read these archives as self-conscious egonarratives of the way in which slaveholders wished to construct themselves and others, but we must recognize that they also stand as tacit narratives of the extent to which bondspeople were able to read their masters’ idealisation of order and represent it for them in letters that served to confirm and affirm their view of their selves, their slaves, and their regimes.

regime in the most favourable light.” Genovese, *Jordan*, 376. Cf. WSP to Moses and Henry, 18 December 1857, Pettigrew Papers.

¹⁶ The very first of George’s letters that are to be found in Cocke’s archives attests to George’s struggle (real or feigned) to live the abstinent life his owner prescribed, opening as it does with the following assertion: “You told me in your letter that you was glad that I had the management of the farm my self and you said you noed that I was able to as you... wish providing that I would not make use of ardent spirits, but I am convinced it has been my greatest enemy and I shall consider it so as long as I live.” GS to JHC, 11 May 1847, *DMLSF*, 153.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 151. No citation given.

Furthermore, even where the idealized image turned out to be false, the archivization of the evidence of its falsehood might still serve as an important embodiment of power/knowledge about slaves. This is because the tensions between the archived material of dutiful compliance – represented in this case by George's letters – and the letters and reports from white authorities tasked with surveillance – men such as Abram Perkins, the man appointed to oversee George after Cocke discovered how disappointing his management had been up to 1848 – served to created an overall master narrative about slaves and slavery that actually served to confirm Cocke's precepts and ideals: since alcohol was a scourge and led inevitably to sin and vice, George's failure to govern Hopewell according to his design, as well as his dishonesty and subterfuge, testified not to the propensity for a slave to disobey his master, but to the evils of the demon drink; Cocke's project was not at fault, merely his players.

However, if George failed to learn the crucial lesson that one's epistolary self had to bear some correlation to the self one presented in day to day transactions, it might well be that the example Cocke eventually made of him served to teach this lesson to his daughter. Lucy, after all, proved to be far more successful than her father ever was in ensuring that the person she presented herself as in her letters was consistent with the one her master heard about from those tasked with keeping her, and the other slaves at Hopewell, under surveillance. But then again perhaps she learned a rather more subtle lesson, for as we have seen Lucy handled her watchers, and indeed her master, in far more cunning ways than her father ever had, and successfully created a role for herself which was carefully crafted to secure her position. Indeed, that she responded to her knowledge that she was under the watchful eyes of others by expanding upon her role as Cocke's agent of surveillance among the black residents of Hopewell and focussing his gaze on the failings of the white was a very subtle and cunning power move. This is not to suggest that she did not also conform herself to her master's expectations, for like her father she was careful to present Cocke with what he expected and to show herself as he wished to find her, but rather to highlight that by writing letters that were both confessional and

indiscrete at one and the same time, she effectively pre-empted any negative reports he might receive by undermining the very men to whose authority she was meant to defer.¹⁸

In particular, his expectation that his slaves conform to his ideas of morality and religiosity (themselves shaped by his own deep commitment to the twin forces of Evangelical Protestantism and temperance embodied by the Presbyterian church of which he and his wife Louisa were members), was consistently reflected back to him in Lucy's letters which unlike her father's made a centre piece of religion, morality and probity, wavering between assurances that both she and her fellow slaves were living righteously and hand-wringing denouncements of the lapses and failures of both slaves and overseers, lapses by others which of course served to highlight her own constancy.¹⁹ For instance, in a letter dated 11 November 1854, Lucy held forth on a revival at the local Baptist church:

....

the revival started here with us and it has been going ever since, and I hope that it will continue to go untill the whole country shall be saved[.] I feel proud that I have repented of all my sins and been forgiven and my name mingled with the people of God here below, and I feels that it is written in the fair book of life.

²⁰
....

¹⁸ See for instance, LS to JHC, 28 August 1855; 20 July 1855; 18 November 1855; 28 July 1859; 22 November 1859, *ibid.*, 201-204, 223, 226.

¹⁹ For comments on Cocke's moral views see *ibid.*, 23-36 *passim.*, while the important influence of his second wife Louisa is discussed at length in Louis B. Gimelli, 'Louisa Maxwell Cocke: An Evangelical Plantation Mistress in the Antebellum South', *JER*, IX.1, (1989), 53-71, *passim.*

²⁰ LS to JHC, 11 November 1854, and 20 July 1855, *DMLSF*, 197. It is interesting to note that a letter from Cocke's son, Cary, written a few weeks after his father's death suggests that 1854 was also the year in which Cocke himself was involved in a Baptist revival: "About 1854 at Wmsburg he was baptized and admitted to communion with that church, but he never on that account ceased to partake of the holy communion with the members [of the Christian Church] and when served by the clergymen of other denominations – so that I do not think that he was to that extent a regular member of the Baptist church or had been given the 'right-hand of fellowship' [.]" Dr Cary C. Cocke to Dr William H. McGuffey, no date cited in quotation, in William Cabell Moore. 'Gen. John Hartwell Cocke of Brema 1780-1866: A Brief Biography and Genealogical Review with a Short History of Old Brema', *WMQ*, 2.XIII.3, (1933), 149.

Just nine months later, however, while she presented her own religious ardour as unabated, it seems that others were not living up to her expectations:

....

I am sorry to say that family prayers are not regularly carryed on. if it is late the people will not stay to prayers. the white people that lives her takes no intress in prayer and it makes the people very backward indeed. I would give any thing in the world if there was one white person on this plantation that was a friend to God and to the works of God. I know that every thing would go on better.

....²¹

But maybe all of this goes to show that Lucy was in fact “relatively satisfied with [her] status” and did, as she certainly appeared to do, identify “with her master’s interests.” Furthermore, maybe Cocke deserves to be acknowledged as a “most indulgent master” who perceptively (this time, if not the last) chose his most “loyal, contented and trusted servant” as correspondent. Perhaps so, yet as we have seen her self-constructions, both as a slave and as a freewoman, appear to have been rather more complex than this simple equation allows, and I would suggest that we might more profitably consider their relationship as one in which mutual interests (as opposed to his interests) sometimes coincided and sometimes articulated, and where the particular circumstance of their correspondence allowed each to use the other for their own ends. For Cocke’s part he not only received letters which satisfied him that his experiment was running rather more successfully than it had in her father’s time, but which also assured him that he had someone upon whom he could rely as an agent of surveillance who would report on the misdeeds of both black and white, even if he also knew that what information she passed on was partial, contingent and censored, a strategically cast bargaining chip that formed part of the never-ending negotiation over who exactly held sway in the relationship between slave and free authorities at Hopewell. For her part, as well as being all these things, her letters were also the price she had to pay for the opportunity to run her school, (which, it will be remembered was the one thing that, as she put it, “I can do more at that than I

²¹ LS to JHC, 20 July 1855, *DMLSF*, 202.

can at any thing else”),²² whilst they also gave her a degree of power that few slaves (especially female ones) would have enjoyed; indeed, as she surveyed Hopewell from the vantage point her letter writing afforded she must have felt an extraordinary measure of control over those she observed, in that not only was she her master’s primary source of information about them but she was also sufficiently trusted that she could affect the way in which he judged the reports of other observers, including those that watched her. If achieving these ends meant that Lucy had to be a loyal and trustworthy lieutenant, so too did fulfilling his purposes mean that Cocke had to indulge her tendency to undermine his overseers, to write what she willed, and to assume rather more authority than he would probably have intended her to have.

Given what was in it for them, therefore, it is unsurprising to find that many slaves employed within this culture of epistolary surveillance jealously guarded their power, and a striking example of this may be found in a comparison of the correspondence received by James Cathcart Johnston from Peter, his slave overseer at Poplar Plains, with the reports he received from James Sawyer, a cousin of Johnston’s who resided on the plantation and seems to have played a rather complex role as his proxy. For though Sawyer’s letters suggest that he was part manager, part master and part overseer, Peter nonetheless seems to have supervised and administered most of the day to day business of the plantation whilst a neighbour, Mr Hallowell, was relied upon by Johnston to administer punishments. What is particularly odd about the relationship is that while Sawyer appears to have overseen work in the fields, it was Peter who determined what labour was required and who appears to have set the slaves’ daily regime.

Given such a complex arrangement, conflict between the different arbiters of Johnston’s authority was perhaps inevitable, and since both Peter and Sawyer were charged with the duty of reporting back to Johnston by letter the historian is thus

²² LS to JHC, 7 December 1865, *DMLSF*, 262.

afforded a window on the way in which these tensions played out. Moreover, it is also important to keep in mind that at least some of Peter's letters (which all appear to have been written in his own hand and not by an amanuensis) were sent as enclosures in the regular correspondence that took place between the cousins, a practice that ensured a level of intrusive surveillance that cannot have escaped Peter's notice and must surely have played a part in shaping what he felt able or compelled to write.²³ But although this must have constrained him from time to time, it is nonetheless important to note that he occasionally demonstrated a determination to express his own view of events despite Sawyer's presence, and a particular example of this can be found in two pairs of letters that relate to Sawyer's intervention in a confrontation between Peter and a slave named Josiah.²⁴ In his letter Peter describes progress on a new building, work that he was overseeing although it involved hiring free craftsmen, managing large purchases of materials and so forth, a level of responsibility that is a testament to the trust Johnston vested in him. He was unsatisfied, however, with the quality of Josiah's contribution, as the following extract reveals:

²³ See for instance Peter to JCJ, 3 August 1850 and JS to JCJ, 4 August 1850, Hayes Collection, which despite the successive dates appear to have been mailed together since while they have identical folds, only the latter bears a full address, stamp, and postmark. *Cf.* Peter to JCJ, 28 July 1850, JS to JCJ, 28 July 1850, Peter to JCJ, 22 September 1850, and JS to JCJ, 22 September 1850, Hayes Collection. It is worth noting, however, that there are a number of other pairs of letters from Peters and Sawyer which share the same date but which were mailed separately, a fact that suggests some interesting possibilities – was Peter aware that Sawyer was writing on these occasions or did Sawyer allow him to believe that his letters would arrive without the accompaniment of Sawyer's own commentary? These are unanswerable questions, and of course the separate letters might merely testify to Sawyer having decided to write only after having received a sealed letter from Peter or having sealed Peter's letter himself; we simply cannot know. But if this was no mere accident then it further complicates our view of the cousins' practices of surveillance. For examples of these separately mailed letters see Peter to JCJ, 28 July 1850, and JS to JCJ, 28 July 1850; Peter to JCJ, 18 August 1850, and JS to JCJ, Hayes Collection.

²⁴ Peter to JCJ, 6 October 1850, and JS to JCJ, 6 October 1850; Peter to JCJ, 11 October 1850, and JS to JCJ, 13 October 1850, (individually folded, sealed, and addressed but both postmarked 14 October 1850), Hayes Collection.

Poplar Plains 6th October 1850²⁵

Master [*James Cathcart Johnston*] I write you to tell you how things are at home[.]

....

I had Josiah and Mathias sawing some planks for corner boards Monday and they never sawed as I told them and went out frome the line and I spoke to Josiah about it and he had a good deal to say and said he never intend to try to do any better and frome that and such he raised his ~~aks~~ <axe> at me

[page 2]

and I sent for Mr Hallowell to come and see to it according to your orders and he ran off in the body to Mr Sawyer and he come and took Josiah[']s part and said Mr Hallowell shall not give him one lick whiles he was within five miles of hear[.] when he come Mr Hallowell was gone home and he come and cursed me and Mr Hallowell because I said Mr Hallowell was to whip him and went into a great sate and I told Josiah he could not stay here without a settlement[.] he wanted to whip him his own self[.] I told him he need not give one lick for me[.] he said he never shall believe that Josiah done or said any thing[.] I tryed to reason with him and told him it would not doe for me and him to be tying up and whiping that it was against your orders[.] So before he let him be whiped he made him run away and he is out now[.] Josiah [said?] to me to have it over and my self and Henderson and some the others saw Mr Sawyer go and whisper to Josiah and I have not seen him since[.] Tho I hope you will not let this hurry you home but I want to see you very bad[.] Mr Sawyer is the greatest enemy that I have and I have [done] nothing to him[.] he can[']t say that I have ever <done> any thing atall to him[.] <[deletion]> Make yourself contented master don[']t <[let them]> hurry home for that tho I have almost been in hot water going on 5 months Mr [...] have told me if he give me any trouble

[page 3]

to let him know and he will come and speak to him but as I hope you will be along in about two weeks I shall not say anything to him[.] Mr Hallowell said he will no come over any more untill you come[.] your obedient servant

Peter

The complex dynamics of power that are revealed in this letter are of course very interesting, and on its own it is a fascinating account of the relationships between the different individuals, white and black, in whom Johnston vested authority. What makes it all the more interesting in the present context is that it demonstrates the way in which the traffic between slave and master could be two-way, a negotiation of power and authority as opposed to a strict regulation of it. It must be read, however, against Sawyer's own account of events which gives a very different view of what transpired:

²⁵ Peter to JCJ, 6 October 1850, Hayes Collection.

Poplar Plains October 6th 1850²⁶

Dear Cousin [*James Cathcart Johnston*],

I am sorry that nearly every letter must contain something wrong about the Plantation but you told me to let you know if anything occurred and I now sit down to perform that painful duty. Last Monday 30 of September, I was in the Body with the people ditching.

....

About 4 O'clock in the evening I saw Josiah coming in the Body. as he came towards me I asked him where he was going. he told me that he was running away from Peter[.] I asked him what was the matter and ordered him to stop, he did so and then he told me that while he and Mathias was sawing Peter came to the saw shelter and looked at the plank and said it was ruined and commenced to curse and damn. Josiah was on the stock drawing the glut and he told Peter that he had done the best he could and Peter told him not to give him any of his damn jaw and picked up a hand spike and started up on the log to strike Josiah

[page 2]

with it. Josiah said that he said Captain Peter don't strike me with that hand spike and had the axe [closing?] the glut. Peter jumped down and said he raised the axe to strike him with. Peter told him that he would blow his brains out, and come to the house to get the gun. Josiah said that he did not want Peter to shoot him and he had run away. I told him he must go back and I took him and come myself to Peter. When Peter saw that Josiah was gone he sent over for Mr Hallowell. Mr Hallowell come and cursed and swore and struck Mathias on the head with his stick because he said that he did not pull his hat off to him. Just before I got here Mr Hallowell went home. I come to Peter and told him that I had brought [~~him~~] Josiah to him, and told him that Josiah was willing to take a whipping if he would let him come in. Peter said no Mr Sawyer I won't rest till Josiah is whipped. I told him I would take Josiah and whip him for him till he was satisfied. Peter said no that would not do. I told him to take and whip him himself if that would satisfy him. [~~I told deletion~~] he said no. I told him to let it rest

[page 3]

till you come and you would settle it. I told him for the sake of peace let it rest till you come. Peter said that he would not be trampled on for the sake of peace and said that he would not be satisfied until Josiah went to Mr Hallowell and take a whipping. I told him again that I would whip him for him. no that would not satisfy him. I asked him if you had given Mr Hallowell the liberty to do so. Peter said that you told him if the People <did not mend> to go to Mr H. When I saw that he would not be satisfied by my whipping him, and would not let it stand till you come [home] I told him that if Mr Hallowell [was to] show me an order from you to that effect that he might whip Josiah, and if he could not show me an order that he nor any other white man should touch any of the People without you said so. Peter jumped up and stamped and cussed and said he

had gone his length and would go over it. He then told Josiah that he should not stay on the land untill he went to Mr H and took a whipping. Josiah went off and has not been in since. Peter denies saying that he would shoot Josiah.

Your affectionate cousin James

²⁶ JS to JCJ, 6 October 1850, Hayes Collection.

In terms of the interlocking cultures of epistolary surveillance constructed by Johnston then, the fact that both Peter and Sawyer wrote in the full knowledge that the other was also going to write about the incident is surely telling since each therefore set about discrediting the other's account whilst also presenting themselves in the best possible light. For Peter this meant making it clear that Sawyer had overstepped his authority and systematically disrupted the disciplinary systems that Johnston had put in place, thus not only making Peter's job impossible by undermining his position but also straining the relationship with Hallowell, and even colluding in Josiah's absenteeism. At the same time, he therefore showed himself to have been doing his best, in difficult circumstances, to fulfil his master's wishes and govern his people in the manner that he had been instructed. Sawyer, on the other hand, sought to emphasize that Peter was out of control and by suggesting that he had intended to kill Josiah, which is to say to damage Johnston's property, portrayed him as both a threat to his master's interests and an insubordinate slave who did not know when to conform himself to the demands of white power. In Sawyer's report, therefore, Peter was drawn as an unreasonable brute while he portrayed himself as a reasonable gentleman who sought only to compromise, despite the fact he clearly thought Peter was in the wrong. His explanation for having refused to allow Hallowell (whom he also portrayed as a brute) to whip Josiah unless he saw Johnston's written authority was thus that this was the only reasonable course open to him when such a compromise proved impossible, a description of events that made it clear to his cousin that he was not questioning his authority, merely doubting the word of his slave.

Furthermore, it is also notable that despite Sawyer's attempt to put an end to the matter, Peter wouldn't let it lie and returned to the issue in his next letter to Johnston which, it should be noted, was not only sealed, as with the previous missive, but this time also addressed by Peter as if to emphasize his independence and his agency, though he of course still had to depend upon the offices of Sawyer, his "greatest enemy," to actually put it in the post, something Sawyer did not do until he posted his next letter some two days later. While in the main the contents of

Peter's letter are somewhat mundane, when he returned to issue of Josiah it was again with the definite purpose of emphasizing Sawyer's complicity in Josiah's absence and how unworkable the relationship between white manager and black overseer had become:

....

Mark made Josiah come in but Sawyer [~~deletion~~] [seeme?] to not like[:] he wanted him to stay untill you come[.] I have not said anything to him, nor had anything to do with him as Mr Saw<yer> has taken his part I don't want to get in any fuss with him.

²⁷

....

By comparison, Sawyer's accompaniment did not elaborate on the events of the previous week, and was instead a day by day account of who was working where in which Josiah notably appears every day, though there is no mention of Peter at all. But given that Sawyer's delay in posting Peter's letter might well have been an expression of his power over the lines of communication between slave and master, his silence should not necessarily be taken as suggesting that he had truly let the matter go, for however much he sought to give the impression that he had risen above it the very fact that he made no comment on the incident with Josiah might itself be read as an expression of his power to include, or exclude, what he would. It is equally possible, however, that the very formal and in fact rather dull account of the week's work was a sign of self-doubt and contrition; as ever the incompleteness of the archive makes it impossible to be sure how the situation resolved.²⁸

Thus as 'privileged' as enslaved letter writers like Peter, Catoe or the Skipwiths may have been, and however much importance masters may have attached to their role as agents of discipline and surveillance, most had owners who were wise enough to keep them under careful observation. But as objects of surveillance they had not only to accept that they were frequently the subject of the reports written by men such as Sawyer and Shepard, but that they might also find themselves the

²⁷ Peter to JCJ, 11 October 1850, Hayes Collection.

²⁸ JS to JCJ, 13 October 1850, Hayes Collection.

subject of other slaves' correspondence. For instance, Johnston's very close friend Pettigrew relied upon two slaves, the cousins Moses and Henry, to manage his Magnolia and Belgrade plantations during his frequent absences, and while he did not, as Johnston did, allow them to write for themselves, he instead provided them with an amanuensis and reader in the form of a white neighbour named Malachi White, though as Genovese emphasizes, their letters, as well as those they received from Pettigrew, make it quite clear that it was not White but Moses and Henry who were in charge.²⁹ Indeed, even when their leadership proved less than exemplary, it is notable that Pettigrew did not call upon White to better oversee their affairs but rather cautioned the pair of them that they must do better.

For instance, in 1857 a slave named Frank Buck made a rather audacious bid for freedom, not only running away, but also making off with (or else colluding in the theft of) gold and silver to the value \$160, money which was not found on him when he was recaptured and about which he refused to speak even after repeated beatings and being incarcerated in Pettigrew's "penitentiary." Furthermore, the robbery and escape had also involved a conspiracy which implicated four other slaves – Venus, Patience, Bill and Jack – who along with Frank had somehow managed to get a set of duplicate keys made, and who thus were suspected of having

²⁹ Genovese, *Jordan*, 375. The friendship between Pettigrew and Johnston has of course been mentioned before for it was they that discussed "troublesome property." Interestingly in his letters to Moses and Henry Pettigrew frequently invoked Johnston's authority to bolster his own, commenting in one, written from White Sulphur Springs, Virginia which the pair were visiting together, that Moses should take note of "how much interest Mr. Johnston takes in you and all your people, and that should things take an unfavourable turn, in consequence of my long absence, not only would I be distressed, but he would also; and you & all your people would not only be disgraced in my estimation, but in his also." But while the slaves certainly were aware of Johnston's interest, and frequently included good wishes for him in their letters, even going so far as to open many of them with the sentiment "my love to master an to master Johnston also," this awareness cut both ways, as a comment from Henry reveals: "ef master will pass all of my letter to master Johnston to read I have some secrets to tell master but I will keep them untill master comes home." WSP to Moses, 12 July 1856; Henry and Moses to WSP, 2 August 1856. Cf. WSP to Moses, 24 June 1856; WSP to Moses and Henry, 10 October 1857; Moses, Henry and Lizzy to WSP, 5 July 1856; Moses and Henry to WSP, 9 August 1856, June 6 1857, August 7 1858, 9 October 1858, 25 September 1858, 30 January 1859; all in Pettigrew Papers.

shared in the proceeds of the robbery; they too were forced to share some of Frank's punishments.³⁰ Such a bold conspiracy was of course profoundly worrying for Pettigrew, and yet he did not, as Cocke might have done, install a white overseer, and nor did he set up some informal system of surveillance, as might have been his friend Johnston's advice. Instead he wrote Moses and Henry a stern letter which began as follows:

Caledonia, Halifax Co. N.C.³¹

Dec. 18 1857

Moses & Henry:

As I am yet quietly here, I will write you again, notwithstanding the fact of my having written you several times already. My writing will show the interest I take in my plantations notwithstanding my absence. You perceive my letters are written to both Moses & Henry. This is because I wish to hear from both of you each week. Write particularly about your business as I am anxious about it – more so than I have ever been at any previous absence. The misconduct of some of the people, whilst I was with you, has much impaired my confidence & renders me apprehensive of a renewal of misconduct in some shape or other. Should there be any outbreak requiring my attention, be assured I will be with you within a few days after you have informed me of the fact, in order to adopt such course as circumstances may require.

....

In some ways rather like the letter Charles Colcock Jones wrote to Catoe then, this letter is a fine example of the way in which slaveowners' construction of themselves as paternalists involved an interweaving of sentimental ideology and authoritarian practicality, whilst also making clear the roles that both Moses and Henry were expected to play as agents of discipline and surveillance. What is particularly interesting, however, is the way in which he reminds them of their shared responsibility, and while for the most part the two seem to have co-operated effectively, it is worth noting that just a month after receiving this letter they each wrote messages to Pettigrew in which each of them seems to have been trying to

³⁰ Frank had also headed an earlier conspiracy which had been discovered in 1850. In this instance the slaves had helped themselves to the stores via a trap door they cut into the floor of a storeroom at Belgrade, a ruse which had successfully gone undetected for some time before they were eventually discovered. *BIB*, 27-28.

³¹ WSP to Moses and Henry, 18 December 1857, Pettigrew Papers.

undermine the other's position. Indeed, aside from this incident, it is striking just how amicably Moses and Henry "shared the reins of power," and Starobin suggests that this effective co-operation might well have been because they oversaw separate plantations, though I would suggest that this situation also resulted in a certain degree of competitiveness and mutual resentment which occasionally surfaces in their letters, such as a message from Henry in which he appears to be complaining about Moses having poached a Magnolia slave to repaint the buildings at Belgrade, prompting his cousin to ask his master "pleas to wright to me whether nellson will white wash Belgrade or no as I need him very bad among my small people."³² On the whole, however, their reports rarely even made reference to one another.

In January of 1849, however, Pettigrew received a rather different letter from the pair, and what is quite remarkable about this *text* is that while each submitted a report that implied that the other was somehow at fault, their words appear on either side of the same page, and one must wonder how Malachi White handled this situation and whether, indeed, he made a point of separating their messages in this way. For given the geography of two separate plantations and the tone of each message it is unlikely that White sat down with both and took dictation and far more likely that he visited one and then the other; as a result it is impossible to say with any certainty what each knew of the other's intentions or actions. Furthermore, since in many of the other letters the messages are written one after the other without White starting a new page until the first was filled, the fact that on this occasion he chose to turn it over is intriguing and might perhaps suggest that he was not entirely

³² *BIB*, 33; Henry and Moses to William S. Pettigrew, 6 June 1857, Pettigrew Papers. It is worth noting Moses' contribution to this letter, while brief is nevertheless very interesting: due to some renovation work at Belgrade white workers were staying on the plantation, but Moses seems to have resented their presence and distrusted them and so wanted them kept under surveillance, yet also felt that this lay beyond his authority: "it is my wishes master ef you please for some carful person to stay at Belgrade of nights when thoes workmons are there at work, ef master pleases."

confident of their illiteracy and thus, in potentially confrontational circumstances, took care to ensure that they did not get to see each others' words.

In any case, to begin with Henry's account, his message opens with a description of the effect an outbreak of measles was having on the slaves at Magnolia and detailing what work was getting done despite it. He then goes on as follows:

....

I had to in several cases of sickness to use some of your Brandy[.] I went to cousin moses an he said you did not tell him to let me have any from Belgrade[.] I have not call on any Doc with my people sickness as yet I have managed them my Self[.] the people are conducting them selves very well

your Servant Henry an your friend

Compare this with Moses' account of the event, which is drawn from a message that does not even mention the measles, but instead, after focussing briefly on the fact that his "people" were "conducting themselves veary well" and boasting of their "veary good health," turns to the subject of brandy:

....

henry came to me after Brandy an you know now Master that Brandy is A veary particular thing[.] I did not let him have it[.] you did not tell me to do so an ef you wish him to have any you will pleas answer the question[.] master I do not think you told me anything about it before leaving home[.]

....

your Servant Moses an your friend³³

While it is difficult to tell whether their different accounts testify to a minor disagreement or to more deep seated and longer term problems, or indeed whether what appears to be the two of them treating each other with greater suspicion in the aftermath of Pettigrew's demand that they be more vigilant is actually no more than coincidental, these two messages nevertheless reveal the way in which acting as a slaveowner's agent of epistolary surveillance provided slaves with opportunities to further their personal agendas, for by criticizing other similarly 'privileged'

³³ Henry and Moses to William S. Pettigrew, 30 January 1858

bondspeople they were thus able to construct themselves as above reproach. Henry, for instance, carefully situated his account of why the brandy at Magnolia had been drunk and why he needed more by putting it in the context of the effects of the measles outbreak on the work regime and his decision to treat the sick himself, thus saving on the expense of summoning a "Doc." As such, he gave a performance in which he cast himself as his master's responsible manager and agent while implying that Moses' refusal to provide more brandy was selfish, petty and obstructive. Moses on the other hand, by leaving out such details (and one may of course question whether he left them out because he was unconvinced by them himself) and stressing instead how healthy his own "people" were (which is itself a tactic that effectively casts doubt on just how sick Henry's can really have been), showed himself to be Pettigrew's most reliable and trustworthy slave whilst suggesting that his cousin may not have been being entirely honest about the consumption of the brandy.

Yet again, however, the frustrating fact is that we do not know how this situation was resolved. Pettigrew may have written to Moses to tell him that he could allow Henry the use of the Belgrade brandy, or so too could he have taken Moses' side and told Henry to keep to his place. We do not know. Yet despite this lack of resolution the incident itself is important since it demonstrates the complexity of the web of surveillance and counter-surveillance that slaves had to navigate, and indeed also suggests much about the paranoid style in which many slave masters governed their troublesome property, as does Pettigrew's letter itself. Nor were such intrigues, claims and counter-claims limited to the experiences of slaves living on plantations, and the letters of hirelings and the quasi-free also contain intimations of a similarly complex epistolary culture of surveillance which was surely complicated by the "divided mastery" that typified their situation. For as we have seen, when slaves such as Judith Cocks wrote to their masters to comment on their treatment at the hands of those that hired them, they did so at the considerable risk that their owners would

reveal their correspondence to the very people they were writing about.³⁴ Yet letters such as Cocks' also reveal something else, for they display their authors' ability to work the system of surveillance in subtle ways, operating rather as Peter or Lucy did and setting themselves up as observers and critics of those that would no doubt submit reports about them. For instance, sometime in the late 1850s a slave named Isabella took what might at first sight seem to have been an extraordinary step in writing to her mistress, Mary Henderson, in order to complain of her treatment at the hands of her current employers and to request that she not be hired to them again:

[29 April 1857?/59?]³⁵

Dear Mistress, [*Mary Henderson*]

I have not been well atall since I left home I have [~~had~~] chills every other day and a very bad cold also. Please not to hire me to Mr Cross next year[.] Mr Speels and Mr Bolton both say they will give you your own price for me next year. I cannot live with Mrs Cross. [...] drives me so badly. She threw a knife at me the other day and stuck it into my arm and then told Mr C that I gave her impudence and he put me in jail three days. She does not pretend to do anything but I have to wait on her as if she were a lady and you know nobody would like that. She does not even get a drink of water for herself not as much as you would but I will try and bear it this year and not have any noise about it though it is right hard after being hired out fourteen years and never got a stroke from an[y ...]* [...] and then to be beat by her is [~~mighty~~] hard but do not say anything about what I have written untill the year is out for there might be some fuss about it.

Some persons have asked me if you know how they lived but I told them that you did not know how she went on or you would not have let him hired me. all Mrs

³⁴ Judith Cocks to James Hillhouse, 8 March 1895, *ST*, 7-8.

³⁵ Isabella to Mary Henderson, 29 April, ND [1857/59?], Henderson Papers. Despite attempts to date Isabella's letter from the Henderson's slave hiring lists (which are relatively consistent for the 1850s), it has only been possible to exclude certain years because the name "Cross" does not appear. Given the number of years for which there are no lists, however, one must thus attempt to infer the date from contextual clues. Since for the years 1849, 1851, 1853, 1858, and 1860, the lists tell us who she as hired to, in 1857 she is listed as hired out but there is no record of who to, so this is a possibility, as of course are the years for which no record exists. In the letter, however, she makes mention of Mary Henderson's son, John Henderson, having told her that about the death of Mary's "little son" and although it is unclear when this happened, the mention of John Henderson suggests that Isabella's letter must date from the later 1850s, since John was born in 1846 and it is difficult to imagine a very young boy being the source of such information, especially given that Isabella was living at some distance from her master's family (the Cross family lived in Wilmington, NC, while the Henderson's plantation was in Rowan County, NC, more than 250 miles inland). Since Mary Henderson died 1861, and given the years when we do know who Isabella was working for, I would therefore suggest that the most likely date for her letter is either 1857 or 1859.

Mcginns family is well[.] I told them about you losing your little son[.] Mr John Henderson told me[.]

your servant

Isabella

Notably, then, Isabella, like Judith Cocks, was concerned that her employer should not know of the contents of her letter, at least until she was free of them, while she was also, like Lucy, setting herself up as an observer of those whose authority she was supposed to respect. However, what is also interesting about her letter is that it suggests that in writing to her mistress she was not in fact doing anything that was especially out of the ordinary. Indeed, the very lack of a comment on the letter itself distinguishes it from letters such as the aforementioned correspondence Ballard received from Delia which made clear that writing to him was an exceptional and remarkable event occasioned only by the imminent sale of her husband, Henry; "Master I take this liberty" she begins "to ask you Pleas to buy henry and let him com hom and live with me."³⁶ By contrast the tone of Isabella's letter and the way in which she makes her complaint and suggests her terms all imply that slave and mistress probably corresponded on more than the individual occasion to which this single surviving letter attests, and even the fact Isabella had the means and opportunity to write and send the letter and makes no comment on having to go to any extraordinary lengths to achieve this (as it will be remembered did Lucy when she wrote to Cocke to complain about the Lawrences) also suggests that the event of corresponding was not especially out of the ordinary.³⁷

Moreover, an individual missive from a slave named Alfred Steele which was the sole slave letter kept by Mary Henderson's grandmother, Mary Steele (who raised her granddaughters and managed the Steel family's Rowan County estates until the young Mary's marriage to Archibald Henderson) suggests that Isabella's

³⁶ Delia to Rice C. Ballard, 22 October 1854, Ballard Papers.

³⁷ As Lucy commented in her postscript to the letter, "I am afraid to direct my letter to you. I will direct it to miss Sally or I will have it directed to Birthier." LS to JHC, 22 November 1859, *ibid.*, 226.

correspondence was not without precedence. Like Isabella's, Alfred's letter is a request not to be hired to a particular employer (in this case a Mr White) although in somewhat different circumstances:

November the 15th, 1835³⁸

my Dear Mistress [Mary Steele]

I take my pen in hand to inform you that I wish to live in Raleigh to be close to my wife but I am not willing to live with [with] Mr white and I hope that you will not make me live where I do not want to live for I do every thing to obey you that is in my power[.] I wish to com up this Christmas but I am afraid that if Mr White hires me that it will not be in my power to com but I hope you will not let <mr> White hier me my Dear Mistress as I dont want to live with him[.] I hope it will not make any difERENCE with you[.] I hope that you will grant me the priverlidg of hiring my own time and you will give you as much or mor than any body els[.] I will pay you any way that you want me to pay you if it is by the month or by the year[.] here is Mr [Martin's?] home very often and if you see proper to let me hire my own time you can get him to see to me[.] I hope that I can get the chance to com up thar a Christmas then I shall say something mo about it[.] I wish you would answer it as quick as you can make it convenient[.] nothing more at present but remaining yours &c

Alfred Steele

That corresponding with his mistress was a far from exceptional act is explicit in Alfred's formulaic use of the phrase "nothing more at present," a choice of words that not only suggests that this is but one of a series of letters, but which is also precisely the same form used by another slave belonging to the Steele/Henderson family more than a decade later. Indeed, out of three surviving letters from this slave, named Anderson Henderson, two, dated 26 January 1849 and 14 June 1857 are signed in this same formulaic way, a similarity that invites one to speculate that these slaves may have learned the form from the same teacher or the same textbook, while the way that each of these letters begin – "I feel it my duty to send you a few lines to let you know how I am geting along," and "I take my pen in hand to write you a few lines to tell you how I am getting a long," – yet again suggest that for him corresponding was a commonplace.³⁹

³⁸ AS to MS, 17 November 1835, John Steele Papers.

³⁹ AH to ArH and MH, 26 January 1849, and 14 June 1857; Henderson Papers.

But if epistolary means were a normal part of the way in which the Hendersons, and before them the Steeles, governed their slaves then this raises an important question: why were these particular letters singled out for archivization? The answer, I would suggest, lies in their value as items within an epistolary culture of surveillance. Isabella, after all, provided her mistress with an important piece of information about her employers, as did Alfred, while it is also notable that Alfred was himself acutely conscious of the significance of surveillance, and went so far as to suggest who might be an appropriate agent to watch him for his mistress.

Thus it is important to recognize that just as the interests of Lucy Skipwith and John Hartwell Cocke articulated around the culture of epistolary surveillance that he established and she subverted, so too can this be said to be true for the Marys Steele and Henderson and their slaves. For while both Alfred and Isabella wrote with very particular agendas in mind, they also wrote letters which worked within both the authoritarian and sentimental agendas of their owners, a tactic which as we have seen was a key means by which slaves sought to turn the epistolary cultures their masters involved them in to their own purposes. For his part, Alfred not only carefully manipulated the discourse of paternalism, offering up comments such as "I hope that you will not make me live where I do not want to live for I do every thing to obey you that is in my power," but also resorted to the profit motive: "I hope that you will grant me the priverlidg of hiring my own time and you will give you as much or mor than any body els[.] I will pay you any way that you want me to pay you if it is by the month or by the year[.]" Isabella, on the other hand, assured Mary Henderson that she did not blame her for the behaviour of Mrs Cross, and that she had in fact made it known to others that she was owned by a good mistress – "Some persons have asked me if you know how they lived but I told them that you did not know how she went on or you would not have let him hired me." Moreover, whilst we have no reason to doubt that her condolences on the death of Mary Henderson's child were sincere, their expression nonetheless also served to highlight their connection as mothers and as women.

At the same time as playing to their owners' self-images, however, both Isabella and Alfred's letters do something more in that they offer up valuable information, for given the complex nature of hiring out, facts about the behaviour of potential or actual hirers were surely valuable commodities. As such both slaves were effectively trading knowledge for a little power over their own lives, and while the archives do not tell us whether Alfred was successful with his bargain, it is notable that the Crosses do not appear on any of the surviving Henderson slave hiring lists. It is therefore tempting to conclude that Isabella's bargain may indeed have been closed to her satisfaction.⁴⁰

But the Henderson and Steele letters also testify to something else, which is the extent to which letter writing bondspeople who lived away from their masters, whether they were hirelings such as Isabella or quasi-free slaves who hired their own time, which is what Alfred hoped to become, were also expected to report on themselves, which is to say that for these slaves epistolary culture involved a degree of self-surveillance. Most often, of course, such slaves wrote in the full knowledge that their letters were not the only means by which their masters could keep tabs on them, yet their correspondence nonetheless afforded their owners the material from which they could construct the same kind of confessional archive that Cocke built from the letters of George and Lucy Skipwith. Thus, amongst the letters written by such slaves, one finds frequent reports on what work they are doing or indeed on what they are doing to seek work, and a notable example in this regard is a letter written by one Jerry Hooper which testifies to the difficulty he was having in getting work serving the students at Chapel Hill after the outbreak of the Civil War:

⁴⁰ Hiring lists for 1849, 1851, 1853, 1857, 1858 (2 lists), 1860 (2 lists), 1862, and 1863, Henderson Papers.

Chapel Hill, NC⁴¹

Oct 18th 1861

Master [*John DeBerniere Hooper*]:

All is well but Lucy. She is about but not very well. I am sorry I did not have the opportunity of writing sooner. I have a bad chance to write. Business is dull. I am just able to live. I have no young men to wait upon and can get into no very profitable business. If times was like they have been I could have earned good wages. I have done all I could. If you are satisfied please let your humble slave know, so that I can make further arrangements. I lost about half my lass session[']s wages. When the war broke out the students volunteered and did not pay me for my labor.

My youngest child is able to sit alone. My wife has generally kept up pretty well. Provisions is very high.

Please let me know how you all are. I remain your faithful obedient an humble slave

Jerry Hooper

Give my love to all.

While Hooper's letter is little more than a progress report, what is striking about it, bearing in mind the exceptional circumstance, is that it is so commonplace, the outbreak of war only relevant insofar as it had disrupted what was usually a profitable business, the volunteers only notable because they had left Chapel Hill without paying him what they owed and because their absence was preventing Hooper from making money on his master's behalf. These minor inconveniences aside, however, "All is well" and the only question was whether his master was prepared to continue with arrangements as they stood. As such, Hooper's *text* stands as an example of how deeply ingrained the culture of epistolary surveillance had become. Indeed, the fact that it continued to operate even as the larger system of slavery came under threat is itself a very telling fact, and it is striking just how many such letters survive from the war years, each of which testify to how firmly established the habit of corresponding with slaveholders had become for such individuals, as well as to fact that they recognized that opportunities for negotiating

⁴¹ Jerry Hooper to John DeBerniere Hooper, 18 October 1861, John DeBerniere Hooper Papers, SHC.UNC-CH.

the terms of their relationship to their masters were worth exploiting even, or perhaps especially, when their status as slaves was being called into doubt.

Bella and Daniel DeRosset, William Henry Thurber and Jimmey, for instance, used their wartime correspondence with their owner Elizabeth DeRosset to do more than simply provide her with the information she required about their situations, and instead made clear to her that they were in dire straights, as the following letter from William Henry makes clear:

Wilmington nc[,] oct 3 1862⁴²

my Dear mis I Rite you A fuv lines for to let you knoo how we ar[,] i hav Bin sick all this well But ar gitting Better sore that i can Bee A Bout. Kitty and [...] has Bin very sick with the yaller fever for sevel Days pass and the peaple that she stay with ar Driving hir out all the time to wurk and she is not abbel to wurk for she can hadley stand on hir foot[,] she want you not to put hir to that man a gain for she is all mos work to Death By them[,] she has suf more than tung can tel[,] ant Juler is well[,] ant Beller is Bout[,] all the Boys is well at the present time[,] giv my Best Love to my mother for mee[,] you mus pray for Wilmington that the Lord mit hav mercy on us and save us from the grate Danger ar over us[,] i Bee leves that wee hav Sinned A ganc the Lord and the Lord ar Whipping us for et[,]

the fever Don["]t sem to Bate[,]

Sum Days et stops for A white and then spred A gain[,] i never saw the Like Bee for of[,] our town ef you walk in the street et Look Like A sory ful time all Day long the hurs is going.

i have not got time to say en ney more

from you or Bedent / Servent

William Henry

george Beny is very sick with the yaler fever[,] the Charles⁴³ Doctor wus Down to see this mor ning

While William Henry's description of the impact of yellow fever on Wilmington and his appropriation of the image of the lash as one wielded by an angry God are perhaps the most striking features of this letter, it is also notable that he still works

⁴² WHT to ED, 3 October 1862, DeRosset Family Papers. Cf. WHT to ED, 23 October 1862, and BD to ED, 3 October 1862, DeRosset Family Papers, both of which emphasize how terrible the yellow fever epidemic has become and which plea for the Elizabeth to send them provisions.

⁴³ In Starobin's transcription he corrects this to Charleston.

within the same discourse of surveillance that was apparent in the Henderson and Steele letters. Indeed his comment that Kitty's hirer has abused her "more than tung can tell" might well be read as speaking to a subject that must actually have been unspeakable between a young male slave and his mistress, namely sexual abuse. Yet in highlighting Kitty's suffering and making reference to such a taboo subject he thus, like Isabella or Alfred had before him, attempts to trade this unspeakable knowledge for the limited power of choice.

But to have been left in so dire a situation also created opportunities to not only remind slaveowners of their duties, but even to push for more than might have been a slave's rights, and while the DeRosset letters certainly testify to the continuity of self-surveillance, they also reveal their authors to have had other purposes. For instance, in a letter addressed to "My kind & affectionate Misstress" Jimmey set about persuading Elizabeth to send him money to pay for his forthcoming marriage, and what should be noted about his letter is the way in which he plays upon both her duties as a slaveholder and the precariousness of her power:

....
 i don[']t like to have to beg but when i know it is my owner from whom i am asking these favors it prompts me to do so & there fore i hope miss Lizzie you will not look oppon it hard[.] i want to ask you pleas mam to send me some monney to try to get something deasent to get married in[.] i expect to be married in may if nothing happens to prevent if yankies don't bother[.] now miss Lizzie i have eye to the times[.] i know the times is hard & hav bin waiting for this time to Pass but the lord knows best[.] most all my time is taken up at the office & i can[']t make much tho they are very kind to me at the office & gives me pleanty to Eat[.] i can find no fault at all[.] i hope you and all will be able to return home soon in peace & safety[.] i will try & be faithful to you until you comes home again[.] the Reason why i write to you for some monney so soon is because i want to look around & see what i can get[.]

44

Jimmey, then, with an "eye to the times" seems to have been suggesting that his mistress should not take his loyalty for granted, for though he would "try & be faithful," between the threat posed by the "yankies" and his own need for money,

⁴⁴ Jimmey to ED, 25 March 1863.

perhaps such faithfulness would simply be beyond him. Effectively, therefore, whilst keeping up the correspondence she required and presenting her with the information she would expect, Jimmey also found a way to emphasize that her power was waning and that she needed to take his own demands seriously.

But perhaps to close this chapter with the example of slave letter writer who took the opportunity of the Civil War to loosen his bonds is a little too easy, for as the Bauers put it, and I have endeavoured to emphasize throughout, “most slaves had to accept the institution of slavery and make their adjustments to that institution.” As such, letter writers such as Jimmey who were in a position to see that the times were changing are atypical of the majority of enslaved correspondents, and so instead of ending it here I would like to close the argument by returning to the letter with which this chapter began. For Catoe’s letter reveals this loyal, trusted and highly ‘privileged’ slave to have utilised his position to construct himself, and his relationship to Jones, in a rather more complex and subtle way than might at first be apparent. As the reader will recall, Catoe opened with a self-construction in which he presented himself as full of “love and grattitude for So kind a master” which followed on from a somewhat effusive tribute to Jones that constructed him as loving and “fatherly.” If one reads on, however, what initially appears as an unambiguous performance of almost ‘Sambo’ like abasement before the noble paternalist becomes something rather different:

....

Be sure it is a great Satisfaction & pleasure to me, and I believe I can safely say to all my fellow servants to hear that our young Masters are doing well, and that they don[']t let none [of] the other young people go before them, for niggas as I am, I want my child to behave better and be Smarter or as Smart as anybody’s children, and besides I know without anyboddys telling me, how it would greeve my Dear Master and Mistress if my young masters did not come up to their expectation.

45

....

⁴⁵ Catoe [sic] to CCJ, 3 September 1852, *BIB*, 49-50.

What is profound about this passage (and we should keep in mind it was dictated to a white scribe, who was thus symbolically subordinated to Catoe, at least insofar as Shepard was performing a service for Cato at the instant of dictation, just as Catoe was subordinate to Jones), is that this is a slave speaking of his master's sons and his own children in the same breath, and implying that they, and thus he and his master, are equals.⁴⁶ Indeed the phrase "niggas as I am, I want my child to behave better and be Smarter or as Smart as anybody's children" bears repeating, for it is as profound a challenge to the racial order as Virginia Boyd's claim on Ballard's sympathy and Boyd's honour, or Hannah's repudiation of the sinful Jefferson. Unlike Virginia or Hannah, however, Catoe spoke as an agent of the culture of epistolary surveillance who had to dictate his words to Thomas Shepard, a white man who in turn kept a close eye on him and his letters. And yet even from this situation Catoe was able to offer subtle resistance to the discourse of paternalism, to dispute the hierarchy of 'race' and status, and to participate in the subtle competition for mutual self-acknowledgment that took place between master and slave on his own terms.

As such even illiterate, loyal, trustworthy Catoe seems to have been giving a subtler performance than understanding him as either a dissembler or a class or 'race' traitor would allow, and with this I mind I would now like to turn to my conclusion which suggests that the tactics that are apparent in the letters of men and women such as Catoe or Isabella, George or Lucy Skipwith, Virginia Boyd or Jimmey DeRosset, reveal the way in which they practiced resistance, they thus give

⁴⁶ When I presented this argument at a seminar at the University of Edinburgh in 2005 an alternative interpretation of this statement was suggested, namely that Catoe was not speaking of own his children and making an egalitarian comparison but instead taking a fatherly interest in Jones'. However, if this is the correct reading Catoe's words nonetheless represent a critical transgression of racial manners in that the symbolism of paternalism was just that, symbolic. To take it literally, however, was an entirely different, and dangerously transgressive proposition, and thus even if we interpret this statement as Catoe doing no more than expressing his own brand of paternalistic sentiment, it nonetheless still constitutes a radical blurring of the appropriate relations between master and slave.

an insight into similar tactics of resistance that other slaves must have used in their everyday dealings with masters. Indeed if as performative *texts* these instances of slaves utilizing their critical literacy reveal the ways in which slaves attempted to manipulate, cajole and manage their masters, or at least to retain some dignity and self respect in a system that sought to rob them of both, we must remember that they learned these skills within slave communities and neighbourhoods where African Americans must all have been attempting to achieve similar ends. It thus suggests that as specific and contingent self-representations they nonetheless reveal much about other slaves' representations of themselves, for each of them must have sought, more or less successfully, to give performances in which they could find some satisfaction, even if they also had to satisfy their masters.

Conclusion

Self and Other in Black and White

Self and Other in Black and White

Resistance is not necessarily an oppositional act of political intention, nor is it the simple negation or exclusion of the 'content' of another culture, a difference once perceived. It is the effect of an ambivalence produced within the rules of recognition of dominating discourses as they articulate the signs of cultural difference and reimplicate them within the deferential relations of power – hierarchy, normalization, marginalization and so forth.

Homi K. Bhabha (1994)¹

Understanding American slavery, which for me means at least trying to comprehend how African Americans made it survivable and European Americans made it conscionable, is no easy task, and if I have achieved anything with the foregoing discussion I hope it has been to present a history of the epistolary cultures of slavery which complicates rather than simplifies this story. For to the history of American slavery the slave letters are just that, a complication. They complicate our view of the relationships between bondpeople and of the ways in which masters and slaves related to one another. So too do they complicate our understanding of how their authors saw and constructed themselves and defined and thought about others. Furthermore, they also raise significant questions about the nature of the slave community and the linkages and disjunctures that existed between the cultures African and European Americans constructed in the shadow of slavery, and thus present useful complications to our thinking about the formation of these cultures and the ways in which each sought to appropriate and subvert the cultural practices of the other. In this regard, they also raise complications regarding the transformations of slavery, for while we may view the epistolary and archival cultures that are apparent in the nineteenth century as products of paternalism and the sentimentality that lay at the heart of this project, the intimations of continuity in terms of enslaved people's self-perceptions that are afforded by a comparison of antebellum letters with those that were written in the late colonial and early

¹ Bhabha, *Location*, 157-158.

republican eras suggest that the transformation that slaveholders worked on themselves was perhaps rather less significant for the victims of their slaveholding.

Perhaps most importantly, however, they complicate the idea of resistance, a concept that has proved of central importance to studies of slavery and yet which often seems to be used either as a coded reference to a particular concept of masculinity, as Baptist argues, or else in a rather nebulous way in order to give meaning to almost every aspect of slaves' behaviour which did not conform to the wishes of their masters.² But if everything from the slaves' economy to their medicinal practice, from playing dumb to committing infanticide is to be categorized as a form of resistance, it is important to consider whether those that committed these acts were actively engaging in forms of resistance, which is to say in Bhabha's terms, self-consciously situating their actions "within the rules of recognition of dominating discourses," in order to critique and counter "deferential relations of power," or whether they were merely, as Stamppp would have it, "unconscious reflections of the character that slavery had given."³ As should be quite apparent, my own interpretation suggests the former and not the latter position, and while the slave letters may often be mute on the specifics of such actions, what they do reveal is that the way in which slaves conducted themselves in their epistolary dealings with slaveowners and their disciplinary agents were intimately informed by sophisticated understandings of the workings of power.

This is not to suggest, however, that my imaginary archive of slaves' letters is somehow to be treated as the Rosetta stone for understanding slaves' behaviour. It is not. For one thing it is inherently limited, not only because of the preponderance of letters written by slaves who occupied particularly ambivalent positions within the power structures constructed by their masters, but also because of how much it

² Baptist, 'Absent', 139.

³ Stamppp, *Institution*, 98.

omits. Furthermore, as I have been at pains to stress throughout, it is much more of a record of the power to archive than of the power to correspond, and while this makes a reading of the historical archives from which it has been constructed a profitable way to analyse the archivists who created them, it nonetheless means that as a set of sources the value we attach to the letters must be measured against the reasons for their survival. Nor am I suggesting that this archive should be used to the exclusion of others, and as my own evidentiary choices will have demonstrated, the meanings of the slaves' letters are best analysed by reading them alongside other forms of testimony, whether this comes from ex-slaves, masters or other observers.

But even with such limitations in mind, the letters nonetheless afford us an opportunity to see at close quarters what were surely highly significant negotiations over identity for those slaves and masters that they involved, and they have the advantage over many other sources by being the *texts* of such negotiations as opposed to texts written about them. As such I think it is legitimate to suggest that what we can learn from them may well be representative of similar negotiations which took place beyond the bounds of the epistolary cultures that have been the subject of this thesis. Indeed, I would suggest that the "contextual, contested and contingent" identities that bondpeople and owners constructed for themselves and each other in these negotiations constituted a most important aspect of the competition between domination and resistance, and thus, as I suggested in the introduction, are a useful way to open up conversations about other aspects of resistance and other ways in which African Americans sought to make their enslavement bearable whilst their masters sought to make it excusable.⁴

But of course it might be argued that in their literacy, or at least their letter writing, these slaves were transformed, for the textual transcription of identity and

⁴ Joan Wallach Scott, 'The Evidence of Experience', in Gabrielle M. Spiegel (ed.) *Practicing History: New Directions in Historical Writing after the Linguistic Turn*, (London, 2005), 213.

the opportunities this allows for its refinement, revision and correction perhaps makes the writing laboratory and indeed the archival laboratory that is its counterpart, such specific and exceptional conceptual spaces as to be completely unrepresentative of the venues in which other slaves had to construct or perform identity, and in this one is reminded of Randall Miller's argument that:

slave letters are seemingly of limited utility in enabling us fully to comprehend the nuances of slave life and culture [because they] were not a common form of expression among enslaved Afro-Americans, or among freedmen for that matter. Most slaves were illiterate people who relied upon the spoken word to convey the full compass of their emotions and thoughts. The written word cannot fully catch the flavor of the call and response, double entendre, gesture, and rhythms of oral communication.⁵

Perhaps so, but since so much of human interaction, even amongst the most highly literate of people, is in fact spoken and not written and consists in gesture and action and not in scripture and inscription, one is of course tempted merely to dismiss this putative problem by repeating C. Vann Woodward's oft-quoted defence of slave testimony in all of its subjectivity, contingency and bias: "as if the same objection did not exist to the testimony of the slaveowners." But in fact, Miller is actually raising a rather more profound point, namely the question of whether it fundamentally alters an individual to conceive of language textually rather than orally, and if we are to utilise the texts generated by bondpeople as a measure of the way in which enslaved African Americans, both literate and non-literate, constructed the world around them and constructed themselves within that world, then this is a crucial issue.

Without doubt, many philosophers of language regard the transition from orality to textuality as a fundamental paradigm shift since written language is amenable to "microanalysis, annotation, revision, rearrangement and interpretation" by both readers and writers in a way that oral dialogue, which only exists in an

⁵ *DMLSF*, 14.

historical present, can never be.⁶ By extension, therefore, the interior life of the self – which is assumed to be at least partially signified in linguistic terms – is also transformed when it is expressed in a written text to be analysed, reviewed and re-written/re-read. Moreover, it can certainly be argued that slaves' own perceptions of the transformatory effects of literacy provide the cue for applying such an analysis to slave writings. Douglass refers to his acquisition of literacy as "the path from slavery to freedom," a pivotal event that allowed him to redefine and reconstitute himself as a subject rather than an object, while the following extract from an 1863 interview with one C. H. Hall, a former slave from Maryland who had escaped to Canada in 1836, is equally telling:⁷

I told one of my brothers that I was going to be free. He was the only one of my mother's fifteen children that I had any confidence in, for all the rest believed everything the white people told them. He had learned to read, as I had, and knew better.⁸

This testimony notwithstanding, however, I think that this concept of a fundamental distinction between the textual and the oral is artificial, and as Paul Ricoeur argues, one may construct an oral hermeneutic model which shares many features with textual hermeneutics in that by memorisation oral discourse may be "fixed in such a way that memory appears as the support of an inscription similar to that provided by external marks."⁹ This is not to suggest that textualising one's self (and others) does not have potentially transformatory, revelatory effects, but rather that to imagine that this is only true of scriptural textualisation is a mistake. For while written texts do indeed have the potential to allow their authors to reflect on their self-constructions in a unique way, but there are many other mirrors in which to style and restyle one's perception of both self and other and thus such textual

⁶ C. Jan Swearingen, "Oral Hermeneutics during the Transition to Literacy: The Contemporary Debate", *Cultural Anthropology*, 1.2, (1986), 138.

⁷ Douglass, *Narrative*, 29.

⁸ American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission, testimony taken, Record Group 94, National Archives, in *ST*, 417.

⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, (Fort Worth, 1976), 33.

construction and reconstruction should not be seen as exceptional or atypical, but in fact merely as a manifestation of a very normal, very human process. In predominantly oral cultures, however, it is frequently unrecoverable and thus it is the fact that the slave letters afford us an opportunity to examine this everyday socio-cultural process that is exceptional.

But we do not merely have to rely on the slave letters for evidence of the ways in which slaves attempted to assert their right to construct their own identities. There is also testimony from both ex-slaves and masters which suggests ways in which gesture and action could serve similar ends as epistolary de- or re-construction of self and other. For instance, ex-slave William Grimes' Narrative contains a striking allusion to way in which the material and the imaginative worlds interacted and were malleable:

At one time my master having caused an oven to be built in the yard, for the purpose of baking bread for the negroes, I went there and finding it not quite dry, made impressions with my fingers, such as letters &c. on it, while the mortar was green on the outside. Gabriel, one of the servants, a son of old Volentine, was ordered to strip my shirt up and whip me; (the word severely, has been so many times used it needs no repetition) my master stood by to see the thing well executed: and as he thought he did not be severe enough, he ordered me to strip him and perform the same ceremony, which I did. He then ordered Gabriel to try to whip me harder than he did before. Then Gabriel knew what the old man meant, to wit, to whip me as severe as lay in his power, which he affected on the second trial, exerting all his strength and agility to the utmost to make me suffer, only to please his master.¹⁰

Now while to an extent we might read this as an act of literate resistance (and the lack of information about *what* Grimes wrote is immensely frustrating) on another level I think it can also be read as an example of the *textuality* of material culture and the way in which it could become the site for slave and master to contest each other's definitions of self and other: where Grimes' master makes his slaves manufacture an object which represents his power to bestow (or deny) sustenance to his

¹⁰ William Grimes, *Life of William Grimes, the Runaway Slave. Written by Himself*, (New York, 1825), (DocSouth, 2001), 18. For an example from slaveowner testimony the reader is reminded of Elizabeth Pringle's description of the destruction of her father's study at Chicora Wood plantation.

bondspeople, Grimes re-inscribes it with a new meaning, making it into a page on which he can write his defiance, sully the pristine representation of the master's authority with his own message and thereby subverting it, in some sense even taking possession of it, and in the extremity of his punishment I think we can certainly detect that for his master more was a stake than a simple act of vandalism. As such, this example draws attention to the fact that in their day to day lives slaves were contesting not only such 'real' issues as work schedules or the maintenance of traditional 'rights', but were also contesting conceptual issues such as their right to an identity that was not defined solely by the colour of their skin or their slave status, and that while these ideological contests may occasionally be discerned in plantation documents, planters' diaries and correspondence, or in various ex-slave testimonies, in slaves' letters they are writ large.

With this in mind I would therefore like to turn to one last letter, written in 1858 by a slave hireling named Sophia who was working in Columbus, Mississippi. The letter contains two messages, one for Sallie Amis, addressed as "Miss Sallie," the other for her sister Elizabeth, addressed as "My Dear Mistress" but then referred to as "Bettie" in the letter. What is fascinating about it is that it reveals a great deal about Sophia's understanding of the culture of sentiment, about how intimately her own life experience was tied to that of her mistress, Bettie, and about how she constructed herself in her relationships to both the Amis family and the men and women who hired her. Moreover, it is also a fascinating document simply in terms of what it can tell us about the day to day life of a hireling such as Sophia, and what is particularly striking in this regard are Sophia's expectations as to how she should be treated. Ultimately, however, what I think is fascinating about this letter are the ways in which Sophia's play on racial and personal identity were the means by which she sought to take control of the discourse that supposedly governed her identity and thus gain a measure of control over her own life. That she did so using the only weapons at her disposal, namely the conceit of sentimental paternalism by which her owners made owning her something they could bear to do and the letters they required her to write, reveal her as a cunning emotional blackmailer with a keen understanding of

the power of a good textual performance. More than this, however, such moves also demonstrates the ways in which ideological strategies of domination could be reimplicated as tactics of resistance, an insight which should inform our reading not merely of the textual signs of resistance within slaves letters but also of its day to day practice in the many contexts in which African Americans lived enslaved lives:

Columbus, Miss¹¹

June 7th 1858

Dear Miss Sallie, [*Sallie Amis Nowland*]

I have just finished reading your letter and hasten to answer it as you desire. I have not given the ring away but have it & will send it to you immediately. I am very sorry indeed the young lady cut up so about the ring & am truly sorry that *you* have been put to so much trouble. You know I do not prize Jacky very high if it had not been for Jane I know it would have been gone long ago for she had hid it ever while I had been home and she had taken good care of it. I was very much surprised to hear of you living in North Carolina. I would be perfectly willing to go to the four corners of the globe to live with you but I do not think I could go to Carolina.

yours truly

Sophia

My Dear Mistress, [*Elizabeth Amis*]

I never knew what it was to be a negro before to be hired about to every rag tag and bob tail. You know I am too high minded to be shocked about so Mr Christian told me to go and look a home & I told him I would be perfectly willing to live any where he would put me <but I would not go and look a home myself> & Mrs Long & Mrs Sparkman have been the best friends after all. I am staying at Mrs Longs now she has given me permission to stay here untill I get a home. Mr C. has gone to Jackson and will be gone three weeks I do not know what he will do with me when he gets back. Mr C wrote to Mr Forest to send for me.

I have been living with Mrs [Little?] for three months just left there this christmas. O! Miss Bettie I wish you would get married and come to Mississippi or Louisiana to live for I couldnt bear the idea of going to Carolina. do you get anything to eat and to wear there. I cant begin to tell you how much I have missed you & my troubles & trials I never knew what trouble was before. I am mighty glad to hear that Old Master has left you something but I was in Hopes he had left you about 10,000 apiece so you would be able to set me free for I am getting old & begin to feel it very much. O! how I did miss you in La. last winter the young ladies were all enjoying themselves so much I know you would. I want you to marry Col. [Bonner?] Miss Sallie will tell you who he is[,] he is just the right age to make you a good Husband. What has Sallie done with Mr Van [Dimoise?].

¹¹ Sophia No Body [Amis] to Sallie Amis and Elizabeth Amis, 7 June 1858,

I wish you were out here to be enjoying your self. Mrs Long house is nicely furnished 5 large rooms downstairs and four up. They are looking for Miss [Long?] every day. Miss Mary Davis & [Rowan?] McMickle are to be married on Tuesday night. Give my love to Aunt Jinnie & Amy [Cherry?] tell them Lethie gave a huge party at christmas and the ought to have seen me there. Lethie and Jane are very anxious for Master Hough to buy them back. I don't consider my name Sophia Amis nor do I expect it to be so untill I get to you all again it is Sophia Nobody[.] the happiest moments I have had since I have been from you were when I was in La. with the children. This letter was written in Mrs Longs house[.] her family & Mrs L all send their love

Sophia No Body

Appendices

Appendix One

Slaves' Letters and The Numbers Game: Enumerating the Archive

Table 1a:

Slave correspondence organized by gender of correspondents, and number of letters and messages, 1770-1865

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Correspondents</i>	<i>Letters</i>	<i>Messages</i>
<i>Female</i>	50	118	124
<i>Male</i>	71	248	307
<i>Anonymous</i>	3	3	3
<i>Total</i>	124	369	433

Table 1b:

Slave correspondence organized by gender and status of intended recipient, and number of letters and messages, 1770-1865

<i>Intended Recipient</i>	<i>Slave</i>	<i>Master</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Female</i>	21	14	4	39
<i>Male</i>	11	36	19	66
<i>Total</i>	32	50	23	105

Table 2:

Slave correspondence organized by letters per correspondent, 1770-1865

<i>Correspondent</i>	<i>Number of Letters</i>			
	<i>1</i>	<i>2-5</i>	<i>6-9</i>	<i>10+</i>
<i>Female</i>	44	5	1	1
<i>Male</i>	49	14	3	7
<i>Anonymous</i>	2	0	0	0
<i>Total</i>	95	19	4	8

Table 3:

Slave correspondence organized by messages per recipient, 1770-1865

<i>Recipient</i>		<i>Number of Messages</i>				<i>Total</i>
		<i>1</i>	<i>2-5</i>	<i>6-9</i>	<i>10+</i>	
<i>Female</i>	<i>Slave</i>	19	2	0	0	21
	<i>Master</i>	9	5	0	0	14
	<i>Other*</i>	3	1	0	0	4
	<i>Total</i>	31	8	0	0	39
<i>Male</i>	<i>Slave</i>	10	1	0	0	11
	<i>Master</i>	22	10	0	4	36
	<i>Other</i>	13	4	1	1	19
	<i>Total</i>	45	15	1	5	66
<i>Total Recipients</i>		76	23	1	5	105

* Includes agencies such as the ACS and various state abolitionist organisations, newspapers such as the *Liberator*, and free individuals including former slaves, free African Americans, "conductors" on the Underground Railroad and even one President, Abraham Lincoln.

Table 4:

Individual correspondents*, letters and messages by decade, 1770-1814, 1815-65

<i>Decade</i>	<i>Correspondents</i>	<i>Letters</i>	<i>Messages</i>
1770-79	2	9	9
1780-89	0	0	0
1790-99	1	1	1
1800-09	2	2	4
1810-14	2	2	2
<i>Total (1770-1814)</i>	7	14	16
1815-1819	1 (+1)	2	2
1820-29	11	15	26
1830-39	23	21	27
1840-49	19	91	92
1850-59	39 (+5)	161	196
1860-65	21 (+5)	65	71
<i>Total (1815-1865)</i>	114	346	414
<i>No Date</i>	3	9	3
<i>Total</i>	124	369	433

* Where a slaves' correspondence spans multiple decades they are included only in the first.
Numbers in brackets are used to refer to these slaves in subsequent decades.

Table 5:

Individual correspondents, letters and messages by state, 1770-1865*

	<i>Location</i>	<i>Correspondents</i>	<i>Letters</i>	<i>Messages</i>
<i>Border States</i>	<i>Kentucky</i>	4	5	5
	<i>Tennessee</i>	6	5	9
	<i>Missouri</i>	8	18	18
	<i>Maryland</i>	5	8	8
	<i>Delaware</i>	0	0	0
<i>Seaboard</i>	<i>Virginia</i>	30	79	93
	<i>North Carolina</i>	33	127	166
	<i>South Carolina</i>	2	2	2
	<i>Georgia</i>	10	12	12
<i>Southern Interior</i>	<i>Mississippi</i>	2 (+1)	3	5
	<i>Louisiana</i>	3 (+2)	5	5
	<i>Arkansas</i>	0	0	0
	<i>Florida</i>	1	2	2
	<i>Alabama</i>	4	84	84
	<i>Texas</i>	3	4	4
<i>Other</i>	<i>California</i>	4	4	5
	<i>New York</i>	3	2	2
	<i>Philadelphia</i>	1	1	1
	<i>Washington DC</i>	1	2	2
	<i>London, England</i>	1	2	2
	<i>None Given</i>	3 (+1)	4	8
	<i>Total</i>	124	369	433

* Numbers in brackets indicate where a slave who has written from a particular state has already been counted as writing from another. Where a slave wrote from multiple locations the location of the earliest letter is counted first.

Table 6:

**Individual correspondents*, letters and messages by locale, 1770-1865
(where known)**

	Correspondent	Rural	Urban	Total
Individuals	Female	19	25	44
	Male	23	35	58
	Total	42	60	102
Letters	Female	72	48	120
	Male	118	101	219
	Total	190	149	339
Messages	Female	97	53	150
	Male	164	104	268
	Total	261	157	418

* This excludes three letters from anonymous correspondents.

Table 7:

Individual correspondents from agricultural backgrounds, by crop, plantation size, and position, 1770-1865 (where known)

		Female	Male	Total
Crop	Cotton	4	4	8
	Rice	2	5	7
	Tobacco	5	8	13
Size	1-49	5	6	11
	50-199	7	7	14
	200+	2	4	6
Position	Field	1	1	2
	House	14	4	18
	Management*	1	10	11
	Total	41	49	90

* Includes managers, overseers, drivers, artisans, and teachers.

Table 8:

**Individual correspondents from urban backgrounds, by position, 1770-1865
(where known)**

<i>Position</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Domestic</i>	15	11	26
<i>Hired Out</i>	6	16	22
<i>Hired Own Time</i>	4	8	12
<i>Total</i>	25	35	60

Table 9:

**Correspondents* by gender of correspondent and gender and type of intended
recipient, 1770-1865**

<i>Correspondent</i>	<i>Intended Recipient</i>							
	<i>Master</i>		<i>Slave</i>		<i>Other</i>		<i>Total</i>	
	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>
<i>Female</i>	11	13	7	7	2	12	20	32
<i>Male</i>	9	39	13	2	0	14	22	55
<i>Anon</i>	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1
<i>Total</i>	20	53	20	9	2	27	42	88

* Since the intention here is to assess inter- and intra-gender communication, where a correspondent appears in more than one category they have been counted in each.

Table 10a:

Slaves' letters and messages by writers and correspondents, 1770-1865

<i>Correspondent</i>	<i>Individuals</i>		<i>Letters</i>		<i>Messages</i>	
	<i>Writing</i>	<i>Dictating</i>	<i>Written</i>	<i>Dictated</i>	<i>Written</i>	<i>Dictated</i>
<i>Female</i>	39	11	109	9	105	19
<i>Male</i>	54	17	190	58	213	94
<i>Anon</i>	3	0	3	0	3	0
<i>Total</i>	96	28	302	67	320	113

Table 10b:

Slaves' letters and messages by writers and recipients, 1770-1865

<i>Recipient</i>	<i>Individuals</i>		<i>Letters</i>		<i>Messages</i>	
	<i>Writing</i>	<i>Dictating</i>	<i>Written</i>	<i>Dictated</i>	<i>Written</i>	<i>Dictated</i>
<i>Slave</i>	20	14	30	10	31	13
<i>Master</i>	54	9	177	54	187	95
<i>Other</i>	22	5	97	3	102	5
<i>Total</i>	96	28	302	67	320	113

Appendix Two

Historical Archives, Contemporary Archivists:

The tacit narratives of the Slave South

In the period following the war, ignorance and the negro accomplished no less evil [than ignorance and slavery]. Reconstruction past, the negro remained as a menace which lowered political morals, caused political stagnation, and along with these, blocked the progress of public education, and was a social evil of the greatest magnitude.

Joseph Grégoire de Roulhac Hamilton, (1919)¹

As has been discussed above, the ways in which archives are constructed and items are emplotted within them produce narrative effects which attest, perhaps above all, to the agendas of the archivists who created them, an insight that is as relevant for our readings of the modern institutional archives produced by professional archivists upon which historians must depend as it is for the collections of documents made by individuals in the historical past. According to Eric Ketelaar, one can thus also construct “tacit narratives” that emerge from the relationship between what is included in the archive and what is excluded from it, though I would suggest that this argument may be taken further in that the ways in which the items within an archive are themselves classified and arranged also creates meaningful narratives, often as an intentional effect, and thus there is also the potential to find “tacit narratives” here, existing in the interstices between what is given pride of place and what is allowed to become lost in archival space.² As such these tacit archival narratives are not simply the products of archivists’ agendas, but are also reflections of the specific purposes for which institutional archives are constructed, and the particular historical contexts in which they are constructed, whilst the availability of archivable material is of course of primary importance.

¹ Joseph Grégoire de Roulhac Hamilton, *History of North Carolina: Volume III, North Carolina Since 1860*, (Chicago, 1919), 219.

² Ketelaar, ‘Temples’, 222-225.

With regard to the history of slavery in the American South, therefore, it is arguable that one concept above all may be seen to have dominated these interlocking processes, namely racism. By this I do not mean to re-emphasize the deleterious effects racism has had on the history/historiography of slavery, but rather to highlight the fact that while critiques of racist histories have generally been accompanied by calls for reassessments of the value of slave testimony, what has been lacking (with the notable exception of the critiques of the WPA materials) is an acknowledgement of the effects racist culture must have had upon the collection and collation of evidence.³ Moreover, even where archivists themselves are/were completely without such prejudices, when they operate within a prejudiced society, racial bias and racial tension must have significant effects upon their ability to compile an archive that is not at least partially structured by racism.

For instance, the extensive archives in the Southern Historical Collection (SHC) at the University of North Carolina (UNC) contain many invaluable sources

³ As an archive, the ex-slave interviews have been minutely critiqued in terms of the way they were conducted and transcribed, the racial dynamics of the interview process, and the extent to which different local bodies sought to suppress, edit, or control what was submitted to national collators, and thus to control the "narrative" of the archive they were creating, as both Rawick and Yetman have argued (see Rawick's 'General Introduction' to *AS*, I.VI, xix-xxxviii, which analyses the effects of the editorial and submission policies of the Mississippi field office on the meaning of the corpus of interviews they submitted to Washington, and Yetman, 'Background', 545-548, 550-552). Sharon Ann Musher, 'Contesting "The Way the Almighty Wants It": Crafting Memories of Ex-Slaves in the Slave Narrative Collection', *AQ*, LIII.1, (2001) 1-31 complicates Rawick and Yetman's conclusions by examining the way in which New Deal hiring policies, which emphasized local autonomy, allowed a project that had been conceived of by black academics, (the anthropologists Paul Radin and A. Watson, the historian John Cade, and the sociologists Charles Johnson and Ophelia Settle Egypt), and which had initially been intended to pay unemployed African American college graduates to conduct the interviews, came to be dominated (with the notable exceptions of Virginia and Florida which employed a majority of black interviewers), by "white government bureaucrats and relief workers" [7], while Lecaudey's 'Mask', 260-277, shows how the resultant racial tensions that underpinned many interviews may have led many former slaves to conceal certain details from white interviewers that they were prepared to share with blacks. In particular, she found that comparing the number of interviewees that discussed "interracial sexual liaisons" seems to have been far greater in Virginia (25%) where the majority of interviewers were black than in South Carolina (10.3%) where most of the interviewers were white [264]. With this well studied field in mind, then, it does not seem to be unreasonable to argue that similar racial effects are implicated in the processes that shaped the institutional collection and archivization of historical documents pertaining to slavery.

pertaining to slavery and slave-owning, including what is probably one of the foremost collections of slaves' letters in the world. For this happy accident (and as we shall see it was certainly not intentional) they owe a great deal to the work of one man, Dr. J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton. Between 1915 and 1948, Hamilton devoted much of his time to touring the South in an increasingly obsessive effort to gather the records of southern families who were prepared to entrust their family papers, correspondence, and business records to what he envisioned as "a great library of Southern human records."⁴ While he, and his successors, have been successful in gathering a great variety of plantation papers (primarily from North Carolina but also from other states of the 'Old South', as well as some from further afield, although these are rather less substantial, though still extensive), there are, however, no documents pertaining to slavery that were donated by African Americans, compared to a mass of papers donated by and purchased from slaveowners' descendents.

In part, of course, this is surely a reflection of a paucity of archivable material, and indeed as I have shown this very lack is itself testimony to slaves' fears of surveillance as well as to limited opportunities to adequately preserve frangible documents, at least when we compare their situations to those of wealthy slaveowners or self-archiving institutions such as the ACS. Two other factors, however, have also played their part: in the first place the relationship between racially segregated institutions such as the UNC of the Jim Crow South and the African Americans who were excluded from them would surely have discouraged slaves' descendents from donating the correspondence of their forbears, if they were even asked to do so in the first place;⁵ in the second, there is the fact that as we have

⁴ University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, *Louis Round Wilson Library*, (Chapel Hill, 1997), 3.

⁵ Like many other institutions of higher education in pre-Civil Rights era America, UNC barred African Americans from matriculating until it was forced to admit them. The first black graduate students were admitted in 1951 after a series of legal battles that had begun in 1932, and undergraduates in 1955. For a discussion of this eighteen year battle between lawyers from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and UNC see Augustus M.

seen the SHC owes its existence to its first director, Dr Hamilton, an arch-Dunningite whose racism is writ large in the epigram that opens this chapter, a racism that would no doubt have predicated against an interest in “Negro” archives; indeed, given his attitude it seems unlikely that he would have even considered that such things would have existed, let alone sought them out. Moreover, Hamilton was a true believer in the ‘Lost Cause’ and thus, whilst his collecting of documents might in many ways be diagnosed as an extreme case of undifferentiating ‘archive fever,’ he nonetheless turned to families and individuals who not only shared his belief in the Cavalier myth of the Old South, but whose archival collections could attest to it.⁶ This is not to suggest, of course, that Hamilton’s inheritors as custodians of the SHC archives share his prejudices in any way, but rather that what they have inherited must have been at least partially shaped by them – we should not forget, after all, that the passage of time is of crucial importance in terms of the preservation of archivable materials, and that as the archivable event becomes ever more remote from the archival present so the likelihood of gathering further material diminishes, a factor which makes the collection Hamilton assembled in the first half of the last century so valuable, but which suggests that the prejudice he inevitably brought to the process of collection is unlikely to be redressed.

The resultant archive, therefore, not only contains significant remnants of Hamilton’s egonarrative, but also reads as a tacit narrative of slaveholding that provides, at least on the face of it, a less than adequate narrative of slaves’

Burns III, ‘Graduate Education for Blacks in North Carolina, 1930-1951’, *JSH*, LXVI.2, (1980), 195-218. Cf. Nelson H. Harris, ‘Desegregation in North Carolina Institutions of Higher Learning’, *The Journal of Negro Education*, XXVII.3, (1958), 295-299.

⁶ As well as in his historical works, other examples of Hamilton’s celebration of the Old South may be found in his scrapbooks (which have now themselves become archive materials held at UNC), where, for instance, he recorded the following sentiments: “We have constantly reminded ourselves and the world that North Carolina was first at Bethel, farthest at Gettysburg and Chickamauga, and last at Appomatox[sic]. I yield to none in my deep pride and reverence for those men who so nobly and heroically carried the banners of a lost cause.” Scrapbook 1, 1903-192, Roulhac Hamilton Papers, SHC.UNC-CH.

experiences. Moreover, this impression is heightened by the way in which the archive is catalogued; although it contains a significant number of documents authored by slaves, they are organized within a hierarchical system that classifies them not by author but by collection, which is to say by the name of the plantation (for instance the Hayes Collection) or the master (for example the Rice C. Ballard Papers), effectively maintaining a symbolic archival relation of domination between slaveholder and slave. 'Common sense' suggests, however, that such a classification may be understood as merely a function of utility, and practicality would indeed seem to predicate against the alternative; the Ballard papers, for instance, cover a time span of 66 years and consist of a wealth of financial documents, correspondence, plantation records and so forth, written by a very large number of individuals. To categorize his letters in terms of individual correspondents, which would be to create a classification that consists of such micro-categories as the Virginia Boyd Letter or the Lucile Tucker Letter, each of which would contain but one document, would thus create both practical problems of storage and arrangement and conceptual problems of organisation.⁷

Within such an apparently utilitarian schema, however, one nonetheless comes across instances in which the hierarchical categorisation by the name of the master rather than the name of the slave produces such anomalies as the item categorized as the Manuel J. Thouston Letter.⁸ This is in fact a photocopy of a letter from Isabella C. Sourtan, a former slave of Thouston's, written 10 July 1865, in which she expresses her desire to return to work for him, and yet even as an individual item the significant categorisation (the one under which it is filed and which gives title to the finding aid associated with it) is the master's name; however much this may be rationalized in terms of utilitarianism and archival custom, the impression it creates is one where Sourtan remains subordinate to Thouston and

⁷ VB to RCB, 6 May 1853; Lucile Tucker to RCB, 25 June 1847, Ballard Papers.

⁸ Isabella C. Sourtan to Manuel J. Thouston, 10 July 1865, Manuel J. Thouston Letter, SHC.UNC-CH.

where the “event” of an ex-slave’s letter writing is accorded less importance than the “event” of a slaveholder’s archivization of their correspondence.

Thus the argument turns back to the issue of the archive egonarrative but this time in terms of self-archivization, for there is a second significant force at work in shaping the archives and the tacit narratives – or perhaps more appropriately in this context the “master narratives” – they produce, namely the significance of what one might term the hagiographical tradition. As we have seen, the great majority of slave letters are to be found in the letter-books and plantation papers of ‘great men’ such as John Hartwell Cocke or Thomas Jefferson, men whose historical ‘greatness’ is predicated not only upon their actions but also upon their legacies – their archival presence. This is not to deny their significance or the importance of studying them, but rather to propose that the tacit narratives constructed within many institutional archives have thus in part been predetermined by the importance individual historical actors have been able to attach to themselves, and that this has been perpetuated by the way in which their descendents and/or inheritors chose to memorialize their ancestors and the way in which archivists (and historians) have responded to these great stores of records. One should thus be unsurprised to find that men such as these occupy such an important place in the archives (and, concomitantly, in history books), especially given the leading roles that many of them played in founding the august institutions which would eventually house their papers or the contents of their libraries, even, in one case, a replica of the actual library itself.⁹ Again, however, their pre-eminence has a profound impact on the way in which, even the extent to which, we can recall the event of slave letter writing, for if ‘great’ status determines the importance of an archive or an archivable document then so too does it create an

⁹ For example, John Hartwell Cocke’s descendents donated his papers to the University of Virginia, an institution he was instrumental in founding, while UNC has housed James Cathcart Johnston’s extensive collection of books in a replica of his library at Hayes Plantation, Edenton, North Carolina. The books were donated along with the Hayes collection of papers (which include Johnston’s slaves’ correspondence) and many original furnishings from the library.

archival master narrative that places 'lesser' documents and individuals on the periphery.

Having said this, it is of course important to acknowledge that there are countervailing archival forces at work, and in this sense document collections such as those compiled by Woodson, Blassingame, Starobin, and Miller, the various publications of the Freedmen and Southern Society Project, or even the entire collection of anthologies, transcripts, photocopies, and photographs that forms my own archive of slave letters, may all be seen as interventions in archivization and memorialisation that seek to deconstruct the narratives, tacit and otherwise, represented by the archives, to conceptually reorder and reclassify them according to new criteria, and thus to construct alternative narratives.¹⁰ Nor are such recontextualizations confined to the activities of historians as archivists, a case in point being Duke University Special Collections Library's 'Digital Scriptorium' project, which has effectively created an alternative archive by making the letters of

¹⁰ Collectively entitled *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation*, the publications of Freedmen and Southern Society Project at the University of Maryland currently consist of a four extensive volumes (a fifth is due to be out early next year), each of which contains manifold documents culled from the National Archives: Ira Berlin, Barbara J. Fields, Thavolia Glymph, Joseph Reidy, Leslie S. Rowland (eds.), *The Destruction of Slavery*, (Series 1, Vol. 1, New York, 1985); Ira Berlin, Steven F. Miller, Joseph Reidy, Leslie S. Rowland (eds.) *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: The Upper South*, (Series 1, Vol. 2, New York, 1993); Ira Berlin, Thavolia Glymph, Steven F. Miller, Joseph Reidy, Leslie S. Rowland, Julie Saville (eds.) *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: The Lower South*, (Series 1, Vol. 3, New York, 1990); Ira Berlin, Joseph Reidy, Leslie S. Rowland (eds.), *The Black Military Experience*, (Series 2, New York, 1992); Steven Hahn, Steven F. Miller, Susan E. O'Donovan, John C. Rodrigue, Leslie S. Rowland (eds.), *Land and Labor, 1865*, (Series 3, Vol. 1, Chapel Hill, forthcoming 2008). As well as these, they have also published a number of distillations of these master-works (thus adding a further layer of recontextualization), which are intended for a wider audience and accompanied with commentaries which make the archival narratives explicit: Ira Berlin, Barbara J. Fields, Steven F. Miller, Joseph Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland (eds.), *Free At Last: A Documentary History of Slavery, Freedom, and the Civil War*, (New York, 1992); Ira Berlin and Leslie S. Rowland (eds.), *Families and Freedom: A Documentary History of African American Kinship in the Civil War Era*, (New York, 1997); Ira Berlin, Joseph Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland (eds.), *Freedom's Soldiers: The Black Military Experience in the Civil War*, (New York, 1998). Their narrative recontextualization of the National Archives is further clarified in Ira Berlin, Barbara J. Fields, Steven F. Miller, Joseph Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland, *Slaves No More: Three Essays on Emancipation and the Civil War*, (New York, 1992).

two slaves, Hannah Valentine and Lethe Jackson, available online. In the context of the current discussion, such a project is notable because it activates the archive in a way which reconfigures its meaning, challenging the “tacit narrative” of domination and subjugation represented by the archivization of the Valentine and Jackson letters as items within a series that is signified by the name of their owner (the David Campbell Family Papers), and instead giving two slave women primacy in an unequivocal narrative which casts their master and mistress as supporting actors.¹¹

While such virtual reconfigurations are significant, however, as we have seen slaveholders’ archives and the master narratives they construct nonetheless remain dominant, for while institutional archivists operate within a discipline in which their agendas may be influenced by prejudice, where the complexities of socio-economic and political relationships have significant effects upon who may be asked, or who may be willing, to contribute material to the archive, and where long-standing (though perhaps sometimes arbitrary) conventions combine with practical utilitarian considerations to govern such practices as cataloguing and physical organisation, they are nonetheless subject to the limitations of the possible. As such, they may only construct their institutional archives from other extant archives and so they are dependent upon not only what has been collected and preserved but also who did the collection and preservation. Given the inherent imbalance of power between slaves and masters, therefore, and slaveholders’ far greater ability, perhaps even propensity,

¹¹ This site went online in 1996 as a part of the Duke University Library’s “Digital Scriptorium” project. For the online resource see Lydia Boyd, Ginny Daley, and Paul Mangiafico, ‘Hannah Valentine and Lethe Jackson: Slave Letters, 1837-1838 From the Campbell Family Papers, An Online Archival Collection’, *The Digital Scriptorium*, (Durham, NC; Special Collections Library, Duke University: December, 1996), <<http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/campbell>>, viewed 14 January 2001. Cf. Marcella M. Curry, Elizabeth B. Dunn, and Janie C. Morris ‘Slave Letters’, *The Digital Scriptorium*, (Durham, NC; Special Collections Library, Duke University: June 1997, revised July, 2002), <<http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/Guides/slave-letters.htm>>, viewed 25 August 2004, which is essentially a finding aid to all the slave letters within the Special Collections Library at Duke University and thus acts as yet another reconfiguration of their archives that creates an active narrative that works against the tacit narrative of the traditional archival order.

to construct archival legacies, it is thus unsurprising that their practices of archivization have had so profound an influence on the shape of the modern institutional archives.

But whatever effects these 'great' slaveholders' successes as self-archivists and self-promoters has had upon subsequent archivization, and whatever subsequent impact racist prejudice (or its correctives) may have had on ordering the larger archives in which their papers have come to reside, a great quantity, perhaps indeed the majority of the slave letters they chose to collect attest to the significance that they and their society attached to the maintenance of discipline in all the manifold meanings of this concept. Thus, whether for fear of slave rebellions or out of a desire to maintain high levels of productivity, a key factor in determining the nature and extent of the epistolary cultures of slavery were the ways in which individual masters and Southern society as a whole sought to achieve day to day surveillance of slaves, slave communities, and, indeed, free African Americans, and the extent to which they perceived literacy and letter writing as a help or hindrance to these practices. Surveillance thus affected not only the archives masters created, but also the letters they received, determined not just what slaves felt they could write in their correspondence, but also whether they were permitted, or able, to preserve it.

Appendix Three

Validating Colonization: The ACS in Private and Public

Tippencanoe[,] mo[.] May the 21, 1848¹

Dear Sir, [Rev. William H. McClain]

You will please not to stope the African repository on me as I am a poor Slave but a cording to will Expects to Goe to Liberia before long and would like to know all a bout it[.] you would be please if you have on hand the April & may numbers to Send them to me[.] If you can[']t send gratuitous I will Try to rease the money before the year is out and Send[.] your paper is a Grate light to me[.]

Titus Shropshire

As has already been shown, mail received by the ACS from slaves makes up an important sub-series within the entire imaginary archive of slave letters, but beyond cataloguing this in terms of different authors and utilizing it to reflect upon their differing situations and reasons for writing, it is important to differentiate between the organisation's archivization of these letters in public and private, for while the ACS archives contains dozens of letters from slaves, only a small fraction of these were published in their journal, *The African Repository*.² This comes as no surprise, given that as a publication the *Repository* was primarily utilised to present endorsements of the ACS from (as well as for) both its white American backers and its supporters in the black population, slave and free, Liberian and American. It thus reads, as Stephen H. Browne puts it, as "a relentlessly monologic discourse which obscured pressing objections in the interest of its own promotion," and yet if we consider that the tacit narrative of an archive is created by the conscious choices archivists make about what is and what is not to be archived, as well as the

¹ TS to WHM, 21 May 1848, *MON*, 56.

² The first edition of *The African Repository and Colonial Journal*, to give it its full title, was printed in 1825 and was published until 1892 when the Society replaced it with a new publication, *Liberia*, a change in emphasis that was intended to reflect the transformation of the ACS from promoters of the cause of colonization to supporters of the colony itself. *The African Repository*, by contrast, had been an organ devoted to the cause of encouraging voluntary emigration, promoting Liberia only inasmuch as it was an ideal African destination for a people it implicitly constructed as Africans first and Americans in name only.

relationship between these two sets of data, then such a “univocal and monologic” discourse provides an important key to reading the larger, unpublished ACS archives.³ The following argument thus suggests that if *The African Repository* may be read as a public archival narrative that was intended to validate the organisation’s principles, aims, and activities to its supporters and to a wider audience that was at best sceptical and at worst critical, then the contrast between the letters selected for publication and those that the Society chose not to publish provide important insights into the way in which the ACS sought to create a visible archive of letters which walked the fine line between legitimizing its precepts on the one hand and confounding its critics on the other, whilst it was at the same time constructing a far larger private archive which revealed the situations of slaves who sought their help to be rather more complex than could be publicly acknowledged.⁴

³ Stephen H. Browne, ‘Textual style and radical critique in William Lloyd Garrison’s “Thoughts on African Colonization”’, *Communication Studies*, 47, (1996), 177-190 *passim.*, 189.

⁴ The extent to which the editors of *The African Repository* were sometimes less than successful in this mission is highlighted by a recent “serendipitous discovery” in Oberlin College Library’s collection of the periodical. Whilst studying the library’s early copies for an entirely separate project, Professor Gary Kornblith found that the first seven issues in the library’s archive had in fact been owned by William Lloyd Garrison himself, and moreover that they contained marginalia, underlining, parentheses, and even, in the first volume, an index of specific passages that Garrison created when he was conducting his research for his 1832 pamphlet attacking the ACS, *Thoughts on African Colonization, Or, An Impartial Exhibition of the Doctrines, Principles and Purposes of the American Colonization Society*, (Boston, 1832). Also in this first volume there is further confirmation of the significance of this find in the form of a note signed by Garrison’s son Francis Jackson Garrison, which reads: “From this set of seven volumes of the African Repository Wm. Lloyd Garrison gathered the materials for his ‘Thoughts on African Colonization.’ The Index on the opposite page, and the marks in the volumes are his.” As such, Garrison’s 1832 intervention may be read as a radical counter-archivization of the public pro-colonization narrative constructed by *African Repository*. For a description of Professor Kornblith’s “serendipitous discovery” see ‘Traces of History: A William Lloyd Garrison Discovery’, in Ray English, Jessica Grim, Megan Mitchell (eds.) *Library Perspectives: A Newsletter of the Oberlin College Library*, 29, (2003), 5, while Browne, ‘Textual style’, 177-190, provides a thorough examination of the way in which Garrison sought to make *Thoughts on African Colonization* a profound (and distinctly Garrisonian) rhetorical counterblast to *The African Repository* by mimicking the periodical’s narrative strategies. Thus, argues Browne, Garrison’s work “serves to set in relief the univocal and monologic quality of the ACS discourse. Accordingly, Garrison represents a rich variety of commentary, poems, letters, proclamations; most conspicuously, he lines up a series of letters from prominent free blacks, in turn renouncing the aims, assumptions, and rhetoric of the ACS.” [189].

It is therefore useful to begin by briefly considering the rationale that made leading lights of the proslavery lobby such as Henry Clay or John Randolph support the ACS, whilst some abolitionists like Gerrit Smith wavered in their commitment to colonization, and others, most notably William Lloyd Garrison himself, turned from being vocal supporters of colonization to rejecting it outright, since the range of criticisms and endorsements of the ACS that came from such public figures in the Antebellum debates over slavery as these do much to contextualize the tensions between the public and private archive. To this end, it is profitable to go on to contrast the various arguments presented by free African Americans such as John B. Russwurm, David Walker, and James Forten with the attitudes expressed by slaves like James Starkey, one of the only bondsmen to have had his letters published in *The African Repository*, or the positions taken by others such as Burrell Mann, Terry McHenry Farlan, or Titus Shropshire whose correspondence with the ACS remained forever part of its private archive but were never once included in its public narrative.

While the cause of colonization may have been championed by Southern slaveholders such as John Hartwell Cocke and Northern abolitionists like Reverend Robert Finley (two founder members of the ACS whose religious conviction led them to a highly conservative version of antislavery feeling), the main constituency among whites to which the Society appealed was one that was less concerned with issues of emancipation than with issues of 'race', and indeed at its very founding slaveholders such as John Randolph and Henry Clay made it clear that its sole purpose was "to consider the propriety and practicality of colonizing the free blacks... not to deliberate upon or consider at all any question of emancipation or that was connected with the abolition of slavery."⁵ Instead, as scholars such as

⁵ James F. Hopkins (ed.) *The Papers of Henry Clay*, (3 vols.; Lexington, 1961), II, 264, in Bruce Rosen, 'Abolition and Colonization, the Years of Conflict: 1829-1834', *Phylon*, XXXIII.2, (1972), 178.

Douglas Egerton and Joshua Zeitz argue, it represented a coalition of Northerners and Southerners, slaveholder and non-slaveholder alike, who could not conceive of the Republic as a multi-racial polity, and who indeed saw free African Americans as a profound threat; as such they were concerned with slaves only insofar as they represented potentially free blacks, and for many unless there was mass colonization 'back' to Africa, slavery was in fact the only alternative to managing a multi-racial America.⁶ Their views were thus well represented by men such as Henry Clay, whose patronage derived not from any overpowering urge to emancipate his own slaves (though he styled himself as favouring gradual emancipation if only a suitable scheme for compensation and colonization could be found), but because "of all classes of our population, the most vicious is that of the free coloured. It is the inevitable result of their moral, political, and civil degradation. Contaminated themselves, they extend their vices to all around them, to the slaves and to the whites."⁷

⁶ See Douglas R. Egerton, "Its Origin Is Not a Little Curious": A New Look at the American Colonization Society', *JER*, V.4, (1985), 463-480 for a discussion of the way in which the consensus view of the nature, ideology, and aims of the ACS as representing the "conservative, religiously motivated end of the abolitionist spectrum" [463] are brought into doubt by evidence that identifies its founder as Charles Fenton Mercer of Virginia rather than Reverend Robert Finley of New Jersey, a reattribution that reveals the connections between the ACS, Southern legislators, and late eighteenth-/early nineteenth-century ideas regarding the establishment of African penal colonies for slaves and free blacks. Thus, suggests Egerton, Mercer should be understood as positioning himself and the ACS within a republican tradition which regarded slavery as a blight imposed upon the American Colonies by the English, which caused serious problems for the Republic that would only be compounded by abolition. Colonization as he thought of it was therefore not intended as an antislavery measure but as a response to the far greater problem posed by a growing population of free blacks in a white society [463-468]. Moreover, as Joshua Michael Zeitz has shown, such views were by no means limited to Southerners such as Mercer, but in fact common currency in Northern states. For instance, an editorial from the Boston *Palladium* published in 1819 concluded that Colonization would "effect two invaluable results in reducing civilization into Africa and relieving us from a population that must always be degraded and miserable here [by allowing it] to become respectable and happy there." Boston *Palladium* editorial reprinted in *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser*, 16 November 1819, quoted in Joshua Michael Zeitz, 'The Missouri Compromise Reconsidered: Antislavery Rhetoric and the Emergence of the Free Labor Synthesis', *JER*, XX.3, (2000), 470.

⁷ Annual Meeting of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States, *the Tenth Annual Report*, (Washington, 1827), 21-22, in David M. Streifford, 'The American Colonization Society: An Application of Republican Ideology to Early Antebellum Reform', *JSH*,

In a modified form, this view was also that of some of the opponents of the ACS who were not opposed to colonization *per se* but rather to the ACS itself which they saw as a front for proslavery ideologues. Gerrit Smith, for instance, though initially a supporter of the Society turned against it in the mid-1830s, accusing its members of being “far more interested in the work of [preserving] slavery than in the work of colonization,” but he was nonetheless still interested in the project 25 years later, writing in an 1861 letter to Thaddeus Stevens that “in the right time and circumstances Colonization is a good thing” and in another letter to his friend John Gurley, “were the laws of nature allowed free play, the dark-skinned races would find their homes within and the light-skinned races without the tropics.”⁸ Garrison was similarly conflicted, his initial support for the ACS rapidly transforming into

XLV.2, (1979), 201. [NB: As Streifford notes the annual reports of the ACS were published under the longer name of the Society from 1817-1838 and in 1843, but otherwise under the shorter name of the American Colonization Society; in the interests of convenience and consistency I have nonetheless used the initials ACS throughout]. Notably, Clay was apparently untroubled by the contradiction inherent in stating that such “vicious” and “degraded” individuals should be in the vanguard of America’s mission to Africa and in the same speech declared that “every emigrant to Africa is a missionary carrying with him credentials in the holy cause of civilization, religion, and free institutions”. One may, of course, dismiss such claims as mere sophistry and rhetorical flourish, but as David Streifford has shown, it is worth taking them seriously since they reveal the way in which the ACS was in fact “much like the educational, Bible, temperance, and missionary societies which proliferated after 1812, ... [a] conservative but thoroughly republican response to a changing social situation.” Furthermore, while its adherents may have been racist, they were actually less concerned with racial inequality (be it biologically or culturally determined) than with racial homogeneity, the latter being understood as essential for the establishment and maintenance of “social order” within a society “based on a rough equality of economic opportunity”, although such an ideology was of course predicated upon a view of blacks as inferior to whites. Despite this, however, this rationale reveals Clay’s suggestion that while free blacks might have harmful social effects upon those around them, when removed to Africa they would carry American virtues with them, as an internally coherent argument that was entirely congruent with larger social/philanthropic movements of the Antebellum era. For Streifford’s analysis see *ibid.*, 201-205.

⁸ For a discussion of Gerrit Smith’s views on the ACS and colonization see John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of White Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race*, (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 97-105, 265-266, while Smith’s own comments are drawn from Gerrit Smith to Rev. R. R. Gurley, ND 1835, quoted in Octavius Brooks Frothingham, *Gerrit Smith: A Biography*, (New York, NY: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1878) pp. 166-168, Gerrit Smith to Thaddeus Stevens, 6 December 1861, *broadside*, Gerrit Smith Papers, Syracuse University, Syracuse. New York [hereafter, Gerrit Smith Papers], and Gerrit Smith to John A. Gurley, 16 December 1861, *broadside*, Gerrit Smith Papers, all in *ibid.*, 101, 265-266.

harsh criticisms. Thus, while in 1829 Garrison spoke in Boston in favour of the ACS, concluding his speech with a “call upon our citizens to assist in establishing auxiliary colonization societies in every State, county and town. I implore their direct and liberal patronage to the parent society,” within just two years he began to publish anti-colonization editorials in his newly founded newspaper, the *Liberator*, to be followed in 1832 by *Thoughts on African Colonization* in which he fulminated against the ACS as nothing less than a Trojan horse for the proslavery lobby.⁹

Amongst black Abolitionists¹⁰ there were also conflicts and about-faces over the cause of colonization that had precedents in the events surrounding one of the very first colonization projects of the Nineteenth century, one which was championed not by slaveholders but by two leading members of the nascent African American elite: Paul Cuffe, a wealthy shipping magnate from New Bedford, and James Forten, a prominent Philadelphian sailmaker. Forten, it should be noted, turned against the ACS almost as soon as it was founded and became a vocal opponent of colonization as is apparent in a letter he wrote to Garrison in 1832 in which he denounced the “odious principles and the utter inefficiency of the Society to remedy the evils of slavery”¹¹, but in 1817 he was still an advocate of colonization

⁹ It is worth noting that Streifford argues in a footnote that due to Garrison’s opposition to the ACS after 1831 the *Liberator* should be seen “as much anticolonization as it was antislavery, as even a cursory review of the newspaper reveals.” Streifford, ‘Colonization’, 212-213, n31.

¹⁰ Forbes, ‘Resistance’, 210-223, provides an important analysis of the way in which colonization was debated within Antebellum African American communities in which she suggests that while blacks were represented on both sides of the debates over colonization, and the community divided over the efficacy of promoting emigration as a means to achieve abolition, it was ultimately “abolitionist Blacks who actively resisted, and ultimately defeated, colonization efforts... [via] the formation of Black organizations aimed at fostering self-reliance, race pride, empowerment and the end of slavery” [pp. 211-212]. Notably, however, Forbes’ paeans of praise for black Americans’ efforts to confound white Americans’ efforts to control and shape their activism seems to have caused her to overlook such important details as John Russworm’s pro-colonization stance, instead hailing *Freedom’s Journal* as staunchly anti-colonization [p. 213]. Cf. Delindus R. Brown, ‘Free Blacks’ Rhetorical Impact on African Colonization: The Emergence of Rhetorical Exigence’, *JBS*, IX.3, (1979), 251-265.

¹¹ James Forten to William Lloyd Garrison, 28 July 1832, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library, Boston, MA, in Documents, ‘Early Manuscript Letters Written by Negroes: James Forten; John T. Hilton; William Wells Brown’, *JNH*, XXIV.2. (1939), 205.

and organized a meeting in Philadelphia at which he called upon free African Americans to embrace the opportunity to be transported 'back' to Africa by Cuffe, who had himself recently returned from his first colonization expedition in which he had transported nine families to the shores of Liberia. Forten's proposition was, however, met with a chorus of disapproval from his audience who, according to his own account, saw the whole idea as a "cruel" attempt to "banish or exile" them.¹²

Twelve years later in 1829, this tension between the idea of colonization as a hopeful alternative to second-class citizenship and the view of it as a denial of black American identity was still apparent in African American debates over the issue, as can be seen in the contrast between an editorial written by John B. Russwurm, co-founder and co-editor of the first African American owned and operated newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*, and who was eventually to become one of the most prominent Liberian émigrés, and David Walker's *Appeal*. For his part Russwurm championed colonization on the basis that since blacks in America were "considered a distinct people... a proscribed race, however unjustly – a degraded people, deprived of all rights of freemen in the eyes of the community," a situation he regarded as irredeemable, they should settle "upon some other portion of the globe where all these inconveniences are removed."¹³ In contrast, Walker struck a very different note:

¹² Patrick Rael offers a nuanced and sophisticated discussion of the way in which free African Americans debated the plans of the ACS and the prospect of emigration in his excellent monograph *Black Identity & Black Protest in the Antebellum North*, (Chapel Hill, 2002), 114-115, 178-181, 274-277, while he also identifies the way in which the confrontation over colonization at the Philadelphia meeting revealed distinct fractures between the nascent Black Nationalism espoused by 'elite' leaders such as John Forten and the Americanism of the constituency he claimed to represent [209-236], a point which usefully complicates our understanding of the relationship between slaves who saw the ACS as a way out of slavery and free blacks who saw it as a threat to their identities. The sentiments of the Philadelphia crowd are described by Forten in a letter, James Forten to Paul Cuffe, 25 January 1817, in John H. Bracey, Jr., August Meier, Elliott Rudwick (eds.), *Black Nationalism in America*, (Indianapolis, 1970), 51, cited in *ibid.*, 209.

¹³ John B. Russwurm, *Freedom's Journal*, 14 March 1829, cited in *ibid.*, 181.

[Colonization is] a plan to get those of the coloured people, who are said to be free, away from among those of our brethren whom they unjustly hold in bondage, so that they may be enabled to keep them the more secure in ignorance and wretchedness, to support them and their children, and consequently they would have the more obedient slaves. For if the free are allowed to stay among the slaves, they will have intercourse together, and, of course, the free will learn the slaves['] bad habits, by teaching them that they are MEN, as well as other people, and certainly ought and must be FREE

....

Mr. Clay and his slave-holding party... are resolved to keep us in eternal wretchedness, are also bent upon sending us to Liberia.... more through apprehension than humanity.... Let no man of us budge one step, and let slave-holders come to beat us from our country. America is more our country, than it is the whites['] – we have enriched it with our blood and tears.

Nor was Walker's condemnation of colonization reserved for "Mr Clay and his party"; he also rounded upon those who would emigrate, arguing that "[t]hose who are ignorant enough to go to Africa, the coloured people ought to be glad to have them go, for if they are ignorant enough to let the whites fool them off to Africa, they would be no small injury to us if they reside in this country."¹⁴

But whatever slaveholders saw in it for themselves, and however accurate those black and white Abolitionists who saw the ACS as providing nothing more than a gradualist front for the proslavery lobby, for many slaves, and indeed for some idealistic masters such as John Hartwell Cocke, it offered a future for freedmen which held the promise of bringing the light of civilization and true religion to the heathen and barbarous, as Terry McHenry Farlan's and Bureell Mann's letters attest,¹⁵ whilst at the very least they hoped that support from the ACS and from its sponsors might spell the end of their bondage. Moreover, the situations from which

¹⁴ Walker, *Walker's Appeal*, 52, 72-73.

¹⁵ Although it is tempting to conclude that people such as Mann and Farlan may have put on a show of missionary zeal to strengthen their cases, the number of émigrés who practiced in Liberia what they preached in America is striking, as their letters home attest. See for instance a letter from Richard McMorine to William Pettigrew's brother, James Johnston Pettigrew, in which McMorine, who was known as Richard Blaunt when a slave, describes his life as a Liberian missionary. Richard McMorine to James Johnston Pettigrew, 20 March 1858, Folder 210, Series 1.8, Pettigrew Papers. For Sherman, Farlan, and Mann's expression of their desires to work as missionaries in Africa see Anthony Sherman to WHM, 23 September 1851; TMF to WHM, 19 August 1856; BM to WHM, 21 June 1847, *MON*, 147-148, 157-158, 15-16

both critics and supporters of colonization wrote were far from those of the men who wrote to the ACS from within slavery – if the Philadelphians opposed colonization as denying them their rights “to participate in the blessings of America”¹⁶ these were blessings slaves such as Farlan, Starkey, or Mann had yet to enjoy.

With this complex and diverse constituency in mind then, the editorial policy of *The African Repository* begins to make sense. For instance, James Rial Starkey’s first letter to the ACS (written under the pseudonym James Wrial, a device he abandoned after this first piece of correspondence) was published in *The African Repository*, perhaps because the following passage served so well as both an emollient to any slaveholder who feared that ACS threatened their power and as a counterblast to those abolitionists and free blacks that denounced it:

....

I have been anxious for the last thre or four years to go to Liberia, and am more so now since she has proclaimed her independence.

But, sir, I wish to act honest in getting there, as I cannot get the means to pay for my time so as I can go, I can see no way to accomplish the long desired object unless I could induce some one to advance the recquired amount, and still hold me in bondage by some gentleman who could be relied upon until I paid it up again – which amount (four hunderd and fifty dollars,) I think I could pay in two years if such an arrangement could be made and my yearly wages stopped, but as long as I have wages to pay, it is impossible for me to get to the country which I long to make my home.

¹⁷

....

Compare this to the sentiments expressed in the following extract from one of Burell Mann’s many unpublished (yet archived) letters:

¹⁶ For the reactions of the Philadelphian anti-colonizationists see Herbert Aptheker (ed.), *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States from Colonial Times Through the Civil War*, (7 Vols., New York, 1968), I, 7, in Rael, *Identity*, 209.

¹⁷ James Wrial [James R. Starkey] to WHM, 29 May 1848, *African Repository*, XXIV (October, 1848), *ST*, 82-83.

Richmond VA[,] August 1st 1847¹⁸

Dear Respected Brother and Writer for the Colonization Society [*Rev. William McClain*],

I humbly ask permission to write you again and I entreat you & the officers of said Society not to take it amiss but to hear me with love and great tenderness, here I once more offer myself to the Society to be it Servant & Slave untill death on the Shores of Africa[,] here in these States, my way as a minister is So blockated in Religion that I can not become wise unto Salvation myself nor be instrumental in turning many others to Righteousness[.]

....

Dear Sir I am a man you know not and perhaps you rather I should get some Gentleman to write for me and if it is preferred by you or the boad I wish you would write me and give me word as to who I should get to write for me, if it is desired, by you, or the boad of directors, I know many Gentlemen that would write for me if it is requested but from being deceived by some in the commencement of my communication to the Society, that I at this time know not who to trust[.]

....

Where Starkey speaks of his desire to achieve his ends honestly, Mann speaks instead of having been dealt with dishonestly, and while the former seeks merely a sponsor whom he will repay to purchase him so that he may eventually be free to go to Liberia, the latter sees the ACS as an alternative master to which he will be “Servant & Slave until death upon the Shores of Africa,” a view that was hardly the image the Society wished to construct for itself or its schemes. As for Mann’s description of the way in which his own desire for salvation was being confounded and “blockated,” this was certainly not an analysis of religion under slavery that the ACS could afford to endorse without alienating its religious supporters. It is thus unsurprising that Mann’s many letters remained unpublished, while the ACS chose to publicize such letters as Starkey’s which did not challenge the established order but instead made clear that slaves such as he could be passionately committed to colonization without challenging the validity of their enslavement or critiquing their conditions and treatment.

¹⁸ BM to WHM, 1 August 1847, *MON*, 18.

Mann's comment on being "blockated" is also worth also comparing with another unpublished letter, this time from Terry McHenry Farlan. Like Mann, Farlan sought the Society's help because he had "a burning desire to go to Africa, to preach the word of God to the native" but he doubted whether his master, one Robert Bolling of Petersburg Virginia, would support him, though in Farlan's opinion he was "plenty able to let me go, & not feel any want therefrom, for he do worth thousands of dollars[.]" Farlan's plight was compounded by the fact that he also had a wife and child belonging to another master, while he also confessed that "my chance is slender in accumulating any money[.]" I would suggest, however, that it was for none of these statements that his letter was thought unfit for publication, but rather for his post-script which reads as follows:

....

this is my own hand writing for I had to study very hard to get to this height in writing, not having much instruction given to me.

T Mch Fr.¹⁹

That Farlan felt it important to emphasize that he had written his letter for himself despite "not having much instruction" is of course a reflection of his own pride in his literacy, but it could also surely have been read as a critique of slavery that fit all too snugly with abolitionist rhetoric concerning slaveholders' attempts to keep their enslaved workforce ignorant, an accusation that was, after all, a trope of the Antebellum Slave Narrative.²⁰ As such, Farlan's letter could hardly be published in *The African Repository*.

Another fascinating series of letters in the ACS archives reveal yet another unpublishable story, that of Titus Shropshire and his family. In the expectation of being manumitted on the death of his owner, a Mrs Shropshire of Lancaster, Schuyler County, Missouri, Titus began corresponding with William McLain in 1848

¹⁹ TMF to WHM, 19 August 1856, *ibid.*, 157-158.

²⁰ See for instance Douglass, *Narrative*, 33, Jones, *Experience*, 14-21, Northup, *Twelve*, 233-234, Jacobs, *Incidents*, 100-101.

and his first few letters relate to his problems in meeting the subscription costs for *The African Repository*,²¹ but in late 1849 the focus of his correspondence changed:

Cherry Grove[,] October 14th 1849[,] Mo²²

Dear Sir [Rev. William McLain]

I take this oppertunity of write to you a few Linds to let you know that the old Lady in dead and Left us all for Liberia but her children is about to Bring suit for the family and we may not get of Before nixt fall but we want to be of as soon as posserable[.] thire Lawyers says they can Brake the will but our Lawyers says they can[']t Brake the will[.] I hope I will not be from my calling as preacher of the gospel of the lord Jesus Christ upon the soil of Africa[.] we are all in the hands of a administrator[.] Know sir any thing from you on that subject will be great with us that is on the subject of Liberia[.]

I sill an yours
Titus Shropshire

Over the course of the subsequent eight years Shropshire wrote another ten letters to McClain of which eight pertained to his ongoing legal battle with Mrs Shropshire's heirs, a battle which he finally won in late 1856 when, as he put it Missouri "Supreme Court givt thier opinion in the case of my family[.] the court decided them all free by the will[.] we Expect to trie to git of to liberia in the fall[.] the court decided the 23 day of December[.]"²³ That these letters did not fit the "univocal and monologic"²⁴ public narrative the ACS wished to present in *The African Repository* should of course be clear – Gurley and McLain could hardly allow their publication to be sullied by a story in which bondspeople contested their enslavement, children contested their mother's will, and a state Supreme Court ruled against a slaveholder in favour of a slave – but beyond this letters such as Shropshire's also suggest that the ACS archives might be read as the embodiment of an institutional guilty conscience, a store of repressed archival knowledge of the reality of slavery and the real reasons that its victims applied to the Society for aid.

²¹ TS to WHM, 21 May 1848, through 30 March 1849, *MON*, 56-57.

²² TS to WHM, 14 October 1849, *ibid.*, 57.

²³ TS to WHM, 11 January 1857, *ibid.*, 60-61.

²⁴ Browne, 'Textual style', 189.

Thus the tensions between the Society's public and private practices of archivization and the slave letters that found their way into one or other of these collections may be productively read as testifying to an internal dynamic which typified the shifting coalitions between the gradual and immediate abolitionists, between emancipators and colonizers, between black and white Americans, and between American slaves and Liberian freedmen all of whose support for the ACS and readings of *The African Repository* were predicated upon different and often conflicting criteria. As such, the fact that so few slave letters were ever published in the *Repository* and yet so many were stored within the ACS archives is telling in that it emphasizes just who men like Gurley and McClain really felt they had to appeal to. Certainly, for their project to work they needed a willing supply of black emigrants, but these were more easily, and more properly in the eyes of men such as Clay or Randolph, to be drawn from the ranks of the free African American population, a group whose own letters were a regular feature of *The African Repository*, and though the endorsement of a slave such as Starkey was not without its merits, too much emphasis on the voices of the slaves would surely have given the impression that the ACS was becoming overly concerned with the very questions of emancipation and abolition it set out to ignore.

Bibliography

Archives

- Alexander and Hillhouse family papers, 1758-1976, (SHC.UNC-CH).*
- Joseph Allred papers, 1819-1864, (DUKE).*
- Austin-Twyman Papers, 1765-1939, (W&M).*
- Archibald Hunter Arrington papers, 1744-1909, (SHC.UNC-CH).*
- Rice C. Ballard papers, 1822-1888, (SHC.UNC-CH).*
- Henry Bibb letter, 1952, (GLC-NY).*
- Blackford Family papers, 1742-1953, (SHC.UNC-CH).*
- George W. Blamire letter, 1860, (GLC-NY).*
- Joseph Carrington Cabell family papers, 1790-1890, (UVa).*
- Elizabeth Amis Cameron Blanchard papers, 1694-1954, (SHC.UNC-CH).*
- Brashear and Lawrence family papers, 1802-1897, (SHC.UNC-CH).*
- Neill Brown papers, 1792-1867 (bulk 1811-1867), (DUKE).*
- Brownrigg family papers, 1736-1986, (SHC.UNC-CH).*
- George W. Burwell papers, 1786; 1800-1884, (SHC.UNC-CH).*
- Cameron family papers, 1757-1978 (bulk 1770-1894), (SHC.UNC-CH).*
- Campbell Family papers, 1731-1969, (DUKE).*
- Cheves and Wagner family papers, 1814-1919, (SHC.UNC-CH).*
- DeRosset family papers, 1671-1940 (bulk 1821-1877), (SHC.UNC-CH).*
- Elliott and Gonzales family papers, 1701-1898, (SHC.UNC-CH).*
- Henry Alderson Ellison papers, 1848-1882, (SHC.UNC-CH).*
- Giles Family Papers, 1727-1886; 1906, (SHC.UNC-CH).*
- Louis Malesherbes Goldsborough correspondence, 1827-1877, (DUKE).*
- Ralph Gorrell papers, 1797-1884 (bulk 1830-1874), (SHC.UNC-CH).*
- Jane Gurley papers, 1830-1841, (SHC.UNC-CH).*
- Jack Hannibal papers, 1878, (DUKE).*
- Pinckney Cotesworth Harrington Papers, 1829-1893, (SHC.UNC-CH).*
- Thomas Whitmel Harriss papers, 1795-1891 (bulk 1828-1873), (DUKE).*
- Hayes collection, 1694-1874, (SHC.UNC-CH).*
- Stephen D. Heard papers, 1758-1889 (bulk 1840-1874), (SHC.UNC-CH).*
- John S. Henderson papers, 1755-1945, 1962, (SHC.UNC-CH).*

- John DeBerniere Hooper papers, 1778-1911, (SHC.UNC-CH).*
- Howard Family papers, 1856-1917, (SHC.UNC-CH).*
- Hubard family papers, 1749-1951, (UVa).*
- John Richardson Kilby papers, 1755-1919 (bulk 1840-1889), (DUKE).*
- John Kimberly papers, 1821-1938, (SHC.UNC-CH).*
- Lewis, Anderson and Marks families papers, 1771-1908, (UVa).*
- Jefferson McCauly letter, 1863, (GLC-NY).*
- Joseph Long papers, 1820-1902 (bulk 1820-1860), (DUKE).*
- John Moore McCalla papers, 1785-191, (DUKE).*
- Jacob Mordecai, papers, 1784-1936 (bulk 1784-1904), (DUKE).*
- Neal family papers, 1816-1916, (SHC.UNC-CH).*
- John Parkhill papers, 1813-1891, (SHC.UNC-CH).*
- Person family papers, 1754-1971 and undated (bulk 1829-1897), (DUKE).*
- Pettigrew family papers, 1685-c.1939, (SHC.UNC-CH).*
- Henry Smith Richardson papers, 1811-1999, (SHC.UNC-CH).*
- Richard H. Riddick papers, 1840-1879, (DUKE).*
- William Slade papers, 1751-1929, (DUKE).*
- William Alexander Smith, papers, 1765-1949, (DUKE).*
- Mary Kelly Watson Smith papers, 1814-1884 (bulk 1857-1866), (UVa).*
- Alexander Hamilton Stephens papers, 1822-1911, (DUKE).*
- Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diaries, 1848-1889, (DUKE).*
- John Whitford, papers, 1829-1921 (bulk 1860-1904), (DUKE).*
- Willingham and Lawton Family papers, 1840-1920, (SCL.USC).*
- Wiliam Henry Wills papers, 1712-1921 (bulk 1803-1882), (SHC.UNC-CH).*
- Nicholas Washington Woodfin papers, 1795-1919; 1950, (SHC.UNC-CH).*
- Wyche and Otey family papers, 1824-1900, 1935-1936, (SHC.UNC-CH).*

Ex-Slave Testimonies

- John Quincy Adams, *Narrative of the Life of John Quincy Adams, When in Slavery, and Now as a Freeman*, (Harrisburg, 1872), (DocSouth, 1999), <<http://docsouth.unc.edu/adams/adams.html>>, viewed 8 February, 2006
- Henry Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave, Written by Himself With an Introduction by Lucius C. Matlack*, (New York, 1850), (DocSouth, 2000), <<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/bibb/bibb.html>> viewed 6 April, 2003.
- Thomas Bluett, *Some Memoirs of the Life of Job, the Son of Solomon, the High Priest of Boonda in Africa; Who was a Slave About Two Years in Maryland; and Afterwards Being Brought to England, was Set Free, and Sent to His Native Land in the Year 1734*, (London, 1736), (DocSouth, 1999), <<http://docsouth.unc.edu/bluett/bluett.html>> viewed 20 July, 2006.
- William Wells Brown, *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States. By William Wells Brown, A Fugitive Slave, Author of "Three Years in Europe." With a Sketch of the Author's Life*, (London, 1853), (DocSouth, 2004), <<http://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/brown/brown.html>> viewed 10 January, 2005.
- *Narrative of William W. Brown, an American Slave. Written by Himself*, (London, 1849), (DocSouth, 1997), <<http://docsouth.unc.edu/brownw/brown.html>> viewed July 20, 2005.
- *Clotel or The President's Daughter*, Robert S. Levine (ed./int.), (Boston, 2000).
- Henry Clay Bruce, *The New Man: Twenty-Nine Years a Slave. Twenty-Nine Years a Free Man*, (York, 1895), (DocSouth, 1997), <<http://docsouth.unc.edu/bruce/bruce.html>> viewed 7 February, 2006.
- William Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom; or, the Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery*, (London, 1860), (DocSouth, 2001), <<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/craft/craft.html>> viewed 19 April, 2005.
- Olaudah Equiano, *Equiano's travels: The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa the African*, Paul Edwards (ed./int.), (London, 1996).
- Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of The Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself*, (Boston, 1845), (DocSouth, 1999), <<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/douglass/douglass.html>> viewed 13 April, 2004.
- *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, John W. Blassingame (ed.), (6 Vols., New Haven, 1979-1999).

- _____. *Narrative of The Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*, William L. Andrews & William S. McFeely (eds.), (New York, 1997).
- Moses Grandy, *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy, Late a Slave in the United States of America*, (London, 1843), (DocSouth, 1996),
<<http://docsouth.unc.edu/grandy/grandy.html>> viewed 14 February, 2006.
- William Grimes, *Life of William Grimes, the Runaway Slave. Written by Himself*, (New York, 1825), (DocSouth, 2001),
<<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/grimes25/grimes25.html>> viewed November 7 2005.
- Frances H. Green and Elleanor Eldridge, *Memoirs of Elleanor Eldridge*, (Providence, 1838), (DocSouth, 2000),
<<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/eldridge/eldridge.html>>, viewed 8 February 2005.
- William Hayden, *Narrative of William Hayden, Containing a Faithful Account of His Travels for a Number of Years, Whilst a Slave, in the South. Written by Himself*, (Cincinnati, 1846), (DocSouth, 2001),
<<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/hayden/hayden.html>> viewed 12 February, 2006.
- Harriet A. Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. Written by Herself*, Lydia Maria Francis Child (ed.), (Boston, 1861), p. 1, (DocSouth, 2003),
<<http://docsouth.unc.edu/jacobs/jacobs.html>> viewed 27 June, 2004.
- _____. *Incidents In The Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself*, L. Maria Child (ed.); Jean Fagan Yellin (ed./int.), (Cambridge, 2000, c1987).
- Thomas H. Jones, *The Experience of Thomas H. Jones, who was a Slave for Forty-Three Years*, (Boston, 1862), (DocSouth, 1995).
<<http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jones/jones.html>> viewed 7 March 2005.
- Elizabeth Keckley, *Behind the Scenes, or, Thirty years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House.*, (New York, 1868), (DocSouth, 1999),
<<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/keckley/keckley.html>> viewed 7 March 2005.
- Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New-York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853*, (Auburn, 1853), (DocSouth, 1997),
<<http://docsouth.unc.edu/northup/northup.html>> viewed 27 July 2005.
- G. W. Offley, *A Narrative of the Life and Labors of the Rev. G. W. Offley, A Colored Man, Local Preacher and Missionary*, (Hartford, 1859), 9, (DocDouth, 2000), <<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/offley/offley.html>> 13 June 2005.
- Charles L. Perdue, Jr., Thomas E. Barden, Robert K. Phillips (eds.), *Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia Ex-Slaves*, (Charlottesville, 1976).

George P. Rawick (ed.), *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, (19 Vols., Westport, 1972).

Ignatius Sancho, *Letters of The Late Ignatius Sancho, An African*, Vincent Carretta (ed./int.), (Harmondsworth, 1998).

Isaac Williams, *Aunt Sally: or, The Cross the Way of Freedom. A Narrative of the Slave-life and Purchase of the Mother of Rev. Isaac Williams of Detroit, Michigan*, (Cincinnati, 1858), (DocSouth, 2000),
<<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/sally/sally.html>> viewed 15 February, 2006.

James Williams, *Narrative of James Williams, an American Slave, Who Was for Several Years a Driver on a Cotton Plantation in Alabama*, (New York, 1838), (DocSouth, 1997),
<<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/williams/williams.html>> viewed 15 February, 2006

Phillis Wheatley, *Complete Writings*, Vincent Carretta (ed./int.), (London, 2001).

Anthologies of Testimony from African American Slaves, Ex-Slaves, Freedpersons and Freeborn

- Documents, 'Early Manuscript Letters Written by Negroes: James Forten; John T. Hilton; William Wells Brown', *JNH*, XXIV.2, (1939), 199-210.
- Herbert Aptheker (ed.), *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States from Colonial Times Through the Civil War*, (7 Vols., New York, 1968).
- Ira Berlin, Marc Favreau, and Steven F. Miller (eds.), *Remembering Slavery: African Americans Talk About Their Personal Experiences Of Slavery And Freedom*, (New York, 1998).
- Ira Berlin, Barbara J. Fields, Thavolia Glymph, Joseph Reidy, Leslie S. Rowland (eds.), *The Destruction of Slavery*, (Series 1, Vol. 1, New York, 1985).
- Ira Berlin, Steven F. Miller, Joseph Reidy, Leslie S. Rowland (eds.) *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: The Upper South*, (Series 1, Vol. 2, New York, 1993).
- Ira Berlin, Thavolia Glymph, Steven F. Miller, Joseph Reidy, Leslie S. Rowland, Julie Saville (eds.), *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: The Lower South*, (Series 1, Vol. 3, New York, 1990).
- Ira Berlin, Joseph Reidy, Leslie S. Rowland (eds.), *The Black Military Experience*, (Series 2, New York, 1992).
- Ira Berlin, Joseph Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland (eds.), *Freedom's Soldiers: The Black Military Experience in the Civil War*, (New York, 1998).
- Ira Berlin and Leslie S. Rowland (eds.), *Families and Freedom: A Documentary History of African American Kinship in the Civil War Era*, (New York, 1997).
- John W. Blassingame, *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries Of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies*, (Baton Rouge, 1977).
- B. A. Botkin (ed.), *Lay My Burden Down: A Folk History of Slavery*, (Chicago, 1945)
- Leslie H. Fishel, Jr. and Benjamin Quarles (eds.), *The Black American: A Documentary History*, (Glenview, 1976, c1967).
- Gerda Lerner (ed.), *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History*, (New York, 1972).
- Randall M. Miller (ed.), *"Dear Master": Letters of Slave Family*, (Athens, 1990, c1978).
- Michael Mullin (ed.) *American Negro Slavery: A Documentary History*, (New York, 1976).

- Elizabeth Petry (ed.), *"Can Anything Beat White?": A Black Family's Letters*, (Jackson, 2005).
- C. Peter Ripley (ed.), *Witness For Freedom: African American Voices On Race, Slavery, And Emancipation*, (Chapel Hill, 1993).
- Edwin S. Redkey (ed.), *A Grand Army of Black Men: Letters from African-American Soldiers in the Union Army 1861-1865*, (Cambridge, 2002).
- Willie Lee Rose (ed.), *A Documentary History Of Slavery In North America*, (Oxford, 1976).
- Dorothy Porter (ed.), *Early Negro Writing, 1760-1837*, (Baltimore, 1995, c1971).
- Dorothy Sterling (ed.), *Speak Out In Thunder Tones: Letters and Other Writings by Black Northerners, 1787-1865*, (Cambridge, 1998, c1973).
- ____ (ed.), *We are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth-Century*, (New York, 1984).
- Carter G. Woodson (ed.), *The Mind of The Negro as Reflected in Letters Written During The Crisis 1800-1860*, (Lancaster, 1926).

Other Contemporary Sources

- Fredericka Bremer, *The Homes of the New World: Impressions of America*, (2 vols., New York, 1853).
- Mary Boykin Chesnut, *A Diary from Dixie, as Written by Mary Boykin Chesnut, Wife of James Chesnut, Jr., United States Senator From South Carolina, 1859-1861, and Afterward an Aide to Jefferson Davis and a Brigadier-General in the Confederate Army*, Isabella D. Martin and Myrta Lockett Avery (eds.), (New York, 1905), (DocSouth, 1997), <<http://docsouth.unc.edu/chesnut/chesnut.html>> viewed 16 July, 2004.
- Joshua Coffin, *An Account of Some of the Principal Slave Insurrections, and Others, Which Have Occurred, or Been Attempted, in the United States and Elsewhere, During the Last Two Centuries*, (New York, 1860).
- George Fitzhugh, *Cannibals all! or, Slaves Without Masters*, (Richmond, 1857), (DocSouth, 1998), <<http://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/fitzhughcan/fitzcan.html>> viewed 10 April, 2004.
- , *Sociology for the South, or, The Failure of Free Society*, (Richmond, 1854), (DocSouth, 1998), <<http://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/fitzhughsoc/fitzhugh.html>> viewed 10 April, 2004.
- Charles Colcock Jones, *The Religious Instruction of the Negroes In the United States*, (Savannah, 1842), (DocSouth, 2001), <<http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/jones/jones.html>> viewed 5 October, 2005.
- Frances Anne Kemble, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgia Plantation*, John Scott (ed.), (Athens, 1984).
- Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom: A Travellers Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American Slave States*, Arthur M. Schlesinger (ed.), (New York, 1953).
- William Still, *The Underground Railroad: A Record of Facts, Authentic Narrative, Letters. &c., Narrating the Hardships, Hair-breadth Escapes and Death Struggles of the Slaves in their efforts of Freedom, as related by themselves and others, or witnessed by the author; together with sketches of some of the largest stockholders, and most liberal aiders and advisers, of the road*, (Philadelphia, 1872).
- Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Elizabeth Ammons (ed.), (London, 1995).
- Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, (Edinburgh, 1955, c1835/1840).
- Fanny Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, Pamela Neville-Sington (ed.), (London, 1997).

David Walker, *Walker's Appeal, in Four Articles; Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in Particular, and Very Expressly, to Those of the United States of America, Written in Boston, State of Massachusetts, September 28, 1829*, (Boston, MA: David Walker, 1830), (DocSouth, 2001), <<http://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/walker/walker.html>>, viewed 17 June, 2005.

Harvey Wish (ed.), *Antebellum Writings of George Fitzhugh and Hinton Rowan Helper on Slavery*, (New York, 1960).

Historical & Theoretical Texts

- Roger D. Abrahams, *Singing the Master: The Emergence of African American Culture in the Plantation South*, (New York, 1993).
- Tunde Adeleke, 'Afro-Americans and Moral Suasion: The Debate in the 1830's,' *JNH*, LXXXIII.2, (1998), 127-142.
- Jeremy Ahearne, *Michel de Certeau: Interpretation and its Other*, (Cambridge, 1995).
- Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention Of The White Race*, (2 Vols., London, 1994, 1997).
- Linda Anderson, *Autobiography*, (London, 2001).
- William L. Andrews, 'The Novelization of Voice in Early African American Narrative', *PMLA*, CV.1, (1990), 23-34.
- 'Reunion in the Postbellum Slave Narrative: Frederick Douglass and Elizabeth Keckley', *BALF*, XXIII.1, (1989), 5-16.
- F. R. Ankersmit, 'Hayden White's Appeal to the Historians', *H&T*, XXXVII.2, (1998), 182-193.
- 'Historiography and Postmodernism', *H&T*, XXVIII.2, (1989), 137-153.
- Herbert H. Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts*, (New York, 1993, c1943).
- 'Maroons Within the Present Limits of the United States', *JNH*, XXIV.2, (1939), 167-184.
- 'American Negro Slave Revolts' Part II, *Science and Society*, 2, (1938), 386-392.
- 'American Negro Slave Revolts' Part I, *Science and Society*, 1, (1937), 512-538.
- Ralph A. Austen, 'The Slave Trade as History and Memory: Confrontations of Slaving Voyage Documents and Communal Traditions', *WMQ*, 3.LVIII.1, (2001), 229-244.
- Michael Awkward, 'Race, Gender, and the Politics of Reading,' *BALF*, XXII.1, (1988), 5-27.
- Brian Keith Axel (ed.), *From The Margins: Historical Anthropology and Its Futures*, (Duke, 2002).
- M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, Michael Holquist (ed./trans.), Caryl Emerson (trans.), (Austin, 2004 c1981).
- David Thomas Bailey, 'A Divided Prism: Two Sources of Black Testimony on Slavery', *JSH*, XLVI.3, (1980), 381-424.
- Houston A. Baker, Jr. *The Journey Back: Issues in Black Literature and Criticism*, (Chicago, 1980).

- _____. *Long Black Song: Essays in Black American Literature and Culture*, (Charlottesville, 1972).
- _____. (ed.), *Black literature in America*, (New York, 1971).
- Frederic Bancroft, *Slave trading in the old South*, Allan Nevins, (int.), (New York, 1964, c1931).
- Edward E. Baptist, "'Cuffy,' 'Fancy Maids,' and 'One-Eyed Men': Rape, Commodification, and the Domestic Slave Trade in the United States", *AHR*, CVI.5, (2001), 1619-1650.
- Lindon Barrett, 'African-American Slave Narratives: Literacy, the Body, Authority', *ALH*, VII.3, (1995), 415-442.
- Katherine Clay Bassard, 'Gender and Genre: Black Women's Autobiography and the Ideology of Literacy', *AAR*, XXVI.1, (1992), 119-129.
- Raymond A. Bauer, Alice H. Bauer, 'Day to Day Resistance to Slavery', *JNH*, XXVII.4 (1942), 388-419.
- Rosalie Murphy Baum, 'Early-American Literature: Reassessing the Black Contribution', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, XXVII.4, (1994), 533-549.
- C. A. Bayly, 'Knowing the Country: Empire and Information in India', *MAS*, XXVII.1, (1993), 3-43.
- Karen E. Beardslee, 'Through Slave Culture's Lens Comes the Abundant Source: Harriet A. Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*', *MELUS*, XIV.1, (1999), 37-58.
- Donnie D. Bellamy, 'Macon, Georgia, 1823-1860: A Study in Urban Slavery', *Phylon*, XLV.4, (1984), 298-310.
- _____. 'The Education of Blacks in Missouri Prior to 1861', *JNH*, Vol. LIV.2, (1974), 143-157.
- Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves*, (Cambridge, 2003).
- _____. *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries Of Slavery In North America*, (Cambridge, 1998)
- _____. 'Time, Space, and the Evolution of Afro-American Society on British Mainland North America', *AHR*, LXXXV.1, (1980), 44-78.
- Ira Berlin, Philip D. Morgan (eds.), *Cultivation And Culture: Labor And The Shaping Of Slave Life In The Americas*, (Charlottesville, 1993).
- _____. *The Slaves' Economy: Independent Production By Slaves In The Americas*, (London, 1991).
- Ira Berlin, Barbara J. Fields, Steven F. Miller, Joseph Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland, *Slaves No More: Three Essays on Emancipation and the Civil War*, (New York, 1992).

- Ira Berlin, Barbara J. Fields, Thavolia Glymph, Joseph Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland (eds.), *The Destruction of Slavery*, (New York, 1985).
- John Bezis-Selfa, 'A Tale of Two Ironworks: Slavery, Free Labor, Work, and Resistance in the Early Republic', *WMQ*, 3.LVI.4, (Oct. 1999), 677-700.
- Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (London, 2004 c1994).
- John Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life In The Antebellum South*, (Oxford, 1979, c1972).
- 'Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves: Approaches and Problems', *JSH*, XLI.4, (1975), 473-492.
- Alex Bontemps, *The Punished Self: Surviving Slavery In The Colonial South*, (Ithaca, 2001).
- Arna Bontemps, 'The Negro Contribution to American Letters', in John Davis (ed.), *The American Negro Reference Book*, (Englewood Cliffs, 1966), 850-882.
- Mineke Bosch, 'A Woman's Life in a Soapbox', *History Workshop*, 24, (1987), 166-70.
- Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Richard Nice (trans.), (Cambridge, 1977).
- Shearer Davis Bowman, *Masters and Lords: Mid-19th Century U.S. Planters and Prussian Junkers*, (Oxford, 1993).
- 'Antebellum Planters and Vormarx Junkers in Comparative Perspective', *AHR*, LXXXV.4, (1980), 779-808.
- Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches & Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race and Power in Colonial Virginia*, (Chapel Hill, 1996).
- Delindus R. Brown, 'Free Blacks' Rhetorical Impact on African Colonization: The Emergence of Rhetorical Exigence', *JBS*, IX.3, (1979), 251-265.
- Bertram Wyatt Brown, 'The Mask of Obedience: Male slave psychology in the Old South', *AHR*, XCIII.5, (1988), 1228-1252.
- *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York, 1983).
- Stephen H. Browne, 'Textual style and radical critique in William Lloyd Garrison's "Thoughts on African Colonization"', *Communication Studies*, 47, (1996), 177-190.
- Ian Buchanan (ed.) *South Atlantic Quarterly*, Special Issue: 'Michel de Certeau – in the Plural', C.1, (2001).
- *Michel de Certeau, Cultural Theorist*, (London, 2000).
- Norma J. Burgess, 'Gender Roles Revisited: The Development of the "Woman's Place" Among African American Women in the United States,' *JBS*, XXIV.4, (1994), 391-401.

- Ronald E. Butchart, "Outthinking and Outflanking the Owners of the World": A Historiography of the African American Struggle for Education,' *History of Education Quarterly*, XXVIII.3, (1988), 333-366.
- Augustus M. Burns III, 'Graduate Education for Blacks in North Carolina, 1930-1951', *JSH*, LXVI.2, (1980), 195-218.
- Stephen T. Butterfield, 'The Use of Language in the Slave Narratives', *Negro American Literature Forum*, VI.3. (1972), 72-78.
- Victoria Bynum, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social & Sexual Control in the Old South*, (Chapel Hill, 1992).
- Stephanie M. H. Camp, "I Could Not Stay There": Enslaved Women, Truancy and the Geography of Everyday Forms of Resistance in the Antebellum Plantation South," *S&A*, XXIII.3, (2002), 1-20.
- Randolph B. Campbell, Donald K. Pickens, "My Dear Husband": A Texas Slave's Love Letter, 1862', *JNH*, LXV.4, (1980), 361-364.
- Vincent Carretta, 'Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa? New Light on an Eighteenth-century Question of Identity', *S&A*, XX.3, (1999), 96-105.
- Joanne M. Braxton and Sharon Zuber, 'Silences in Harriet "Linda Brent" Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*,' in Elaine Hedges and Shelley Fisher Fishkin (eds.), *Listening to Silences: New Essays in Feminist Criticism*, (Oxford, 1994), 146-68.
- Deborah M. Garfield and Rafia Zafar (eds.), *Harriet Jacobs and Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: New Critical Essays*, (Cambridge, 1996)
- Russ Castronovo, 'Radical Configurations of History in the Era of American Slavery,' *AL*, LXV.3, (1993), 523-547.
- Michel de Certeau, *The Writing Of History*, Tom Conley (trans./ed.), (New York, 1988).
- _____. *Heterologies: Discourses on the Other*, Brian Massumi (trans.), (Minneapolis, 1986).
- _____. *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Steven Rendall (trans./ed.), (Berkeley, 1984).
- _____. 'History and Mysticism', Arthur Goldhammer (trans.), (1973), in Jacques Revel and Lynn Hunt (eds.), *Histories: French Construction of the Past*, (New York, 1995) 437-449.
- _____. *The Possession at Loudun*, Michael B. Smith (trans.), (Chicago, 2000, c1970).
- Roger Chartier, 'Writing the Practices', *French Historical Studies*, XXI.2, (1998), 255-264.
- _____. *On The Edge of The Cliff: History, Languages, and Practices*, Lydia G. Cochrane (trans.), (Baltimore, 1997), 84.

- _____. *Forms and Meaning: Texts, Performances, and Audiences from Codex to Computer* (Philadelphia, 1994).
- Yvonne Chireau, 'Conjure and Christianity in the Nineteenth Century: Religious Elements in African American Magic', *Religion and American Culture*, VII.2, (Summer, 1997), 225-246.
- Erskine Clarke, *Dwelling Place: A Plantation Epic*, (New Haven, 2005).
- Cheryll Ann Cody, 'There Was No "Absalom" on the Ball Plantations: Slave-Naming Practices in the South Carolina Low Country, 1720-1865', *AHR*, XCII.3, (Jun. 1987), 563-596.
- Anthony P. Cohen (ed.), *Signifying Identities: Anthropological Perspectives on Boundaries and Contested Values*, (London, 2000).
- _____. *Self Consciousness: An Alternative Anthropology of Identity*, (London, 1994).
- James H. Cone, 'Black Theology in American Religion', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, LIII.4, (1985), 755-771.
- Janet Duitsman Cornelius, *When I Can Read My Title Clear: Literacy, Slavery, and Religion in the Antebellum South* (Columbia, 1991).
- _____. "'We Slipped and Learned to Read": Slave Accounts of the Literacy Process, 1830-1865', *Phylon*, XLIV.3, (1983), 171-186.
- Margaret Washington Creel, *A Peculiar People: Slave Religion and Community-Culture among the Gullahs*, (New York, , 1988).
- Jeffrey J. Crow, 'Slave Rebelliousness and Social Conflict in North Carolina, 1775 to 1802,' *WMQ*, 3.XXXVII.1, (1980), 79-102.
- Martha J. Cutter, 'Dismantling "The Master's House": Critical Literacy in Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*', *Callaloo*, XIX.1. (1996), 209-225.
- Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race & Class*, (London, 1982, c1981).
- David Brion Davis *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World*, (Oxford, 2006).
- _____. 'Constructing Race: A Reflection,' *WMQ*, 3.XLIV.1, (1997), 7-18.
- _____. 'Reflections on Abolitionism and Ideological Hegemony, *AHR*, XCII.4, (1987), 797-812.
- _____. *Slavery and Human Progress*, (New York, 1984).
- _____. *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823*, (Oxford, 1975).
- _____. *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, (Ithaca, 1966).

- _____. 'Some Ideological Functions of Prejudice in Ante-Bellum America,' *AQ*, XV.2, (1963), 115-125.
- Mitchell Dean, *Critical and Effective Histories: Foucault's Methods and Historical Sociology*, (London, 1994).
- Carl N. Degler, *The Other South: Southern Dissenters in the Nineteenth Century*, (New York, 1974).
- _____. *Neither Black Nor White: Slavery and Race Relations in Brazil and the United States* (New York, 1971).
- _____. 'Slavery in Brazil and the United States: An Essay in Comparative History', *AHR*, LXXV.4. (1970), 1004-1028.
- _____. 'Slavery and the Genesis of American Race Prejudice', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, II.1, (1959), 49-66.
- Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Eric Prenowitz (trans.), (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
- Robert E. Desrochers, "'Not Fade Away": The Narrative of Venture Smith, an African American in the Early Republic,' *JAH*, LXXXIV.1, (1997), 40-66.
- Charles B. Dew, *Bond of Iron: Master and Slave at Buffalo Forge*, (New York, 1994).
- _____. 'Disciplining Slave Ironworkers in the Antebellum South: Coercion, Conciliation, and Accommodation', *AHR*, LXXIX.2, (1974), 393-418
- Virginia R. Dominguez, 'A Taste for "the Other": Intellectual Complicity in Radicalizing Practices,' *Current Anthropology*, XXXV.4, (1994), 333-348.
- Bruce Dorsey, 'A Gendered History Of African Colonization In The Antebellum United States', *JSocH*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (2000), 77-103.
- Beth Maclay Doriani, 'Black Womanhood in Nineteenth-Century America: Subversion and Self-Construction in Two Women's Autobiographies', *AQ*, XLIII.2, (1991), 199-222.
- Kimberly Drake, 'Rewriting the American Self: Race, Gender, and Identity in the Autobiographies of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs', *MELUS*, XII.4, (1997), 91-108.
- Seymour Drescher, 'Brazilian Abolition in Comparative Perspective', *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, LXVIII.3, (1988), 429-460.
- Thomas J. Durant, Jr., 'The Enduring Legacy of an African-American Plantation Church', *JNH*, LXXX.2, (1995), 81-95.
- William Dusenberre, *Them Dark Days: Slavery in the American Rice Swamps*, (Athens, 1996).
- Clement Eaton, *The Mind of the Old South*, (Baton Rouge, 1967).

- Douglas R. Egerton, *He Shall Go Out Free: The Lives of Denmark Vesey*, (Madison, 1999).
- “‘Its Origin Is Not a Little Curious’: A New Look at the American Colonization Society”, *JER*, V.4, (1985), 463-480
- Stanley Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem In American Institutional And Intellectual Life*, (Chicago, 1976, c1959).
- Anthony Elliot, *Concepts of The Self*, (Cambridge, 2001).
- Mary Ellison, ‘Resistance to Oppression: Black Women’s Response to Slavery in the United States’, *S&A*, IV.1, (1983), 56-63;
- David Eltis, ‘Europeans and the Rise and Fall of African Slavery in the Americas: An Interpretation’, *AHR*, XCVIII.5, (1993), 1399-1423.
- Betsy Erkkila, ‘Ethnicity, Literary Theory, and the Grounds of Resistance’, *AQ*, XLVII.4, (1995), 563-594.
- Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (ed.), *Race and The Enlightenment: A Reader*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).
- M. Giulia Fabi, ‘The “Unguarded Expressions of the Feelings of the Negroes”: Gender, Slave Resistance, and William Wells Brown’s Revisions of *Clotel*’, *AAR*, XXVII.4, (1993), 639-654.
- Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Charles Lam Markmann (trans.), (London, 1986, c1952).
- Barbara Jeanne Fields, ‘Of Rogues and Geldings’, *AHR*, 108.5, (2003), 21 pars., <<http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/108.5/fields.html>>, viewed 11 June 2006.
- *Slavery and Freedom on The Middle Ground: Maryland During the Nineteenth Century*, (New Haven, 1985).
- David Hackett Fischer, *Historians’ Fallacies: Toward A Logic of Historical Thought*, (London, 1971).
- Katherine Fishburn, *The Problem of Embodiment in Early African American Narrative*, (Westport, CT; London: Greenwood Press, 1997).
- Suzanne Fleischman, ‘Gender, the Personal, and the Voice of Scholarship: A Viewpoint’, *Signs*, XXIII.4, (1998), 975-1016.
- Jennifer Fleischner, *Mastering Slavery: Memory, Family, and Identity in Women’s Slave Narratives*, (New York, 1996).
- Robert William Fogel, *Without Consent Or Contract: The Rise And Fall Of American Slavery*, (New York, 1989).
- Robert William Fogel, Stanley L. Engerman, *Time On The Cross: The Economics Of American Negro Slavery*, (2 Vols., Boston, 1974).

- Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War*, (New York, 1995).
- Ella Forbes, 'African American Resistance to Colonization', *JBS*, XXI.2, (1990), 210-223.
- Lacy K. Ford, Jr., 'Making the "White Man's Country" White: Race, Slavery, and State-Building in the Jacksonian South', *JER*, XIX.4, (1999), 713-737.
- Michel Foucault, 'About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self: Two Lectures at Dartmouth,' *Political Theory*, XXI.2, (1993), 198-227.
- _____, *History of Sexuality*, Mark Hurley (trans.), (New York, 1980).
- _____, *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977*, Colin Gordon (trans./ed.), (Brighton, 1980).
- _____, *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected essays and interviews*, Donald F. Bouchard (trans./ed), Sherry Simon (trans.), (Oxford, 1977).
- _____, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of The Prison*, Alan Sheridan (trans.), (London, 1977, c1975).
- _____, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Alan Sheridan (trans.), (London, 1989, c1972).
- _____, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, (1989, c1970).
- Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill, 1988).
- Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Eugene D. Genovese, *Fruits of Merchant Capital: Slavery and Bourgeois Property in the Rise and Expansion of Capitalism* (New York, 1983).
- John Hope Franklin, Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation*, (New York, 1999).
- V. P. Franklin, Bettye Collier-Thomas, 'Biography, Race Vindication, and African-American Intellectuals: Introductory Essay,' *JNH*, LXXXI.1/4, (1996), 1-16.
- Vincent Franklin, 'Slavery, Personality, and Black Culture: Some Theoretical Issues', *Phylon*, XXXV.1, (1974), 54-63.
- E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in The United States*, (Chicago, 1966, c1939).
- George M. Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History*, (New York, 1981).
- _____, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914*, (New York, 1971).
- William W. Freehling, *The Reintegration of American History: Slavery and the Civil War*, (Oxford, 1994).

- Raymond Gaita, *A Common Humanity: Thinking About Love and Truth and Justice*, (London, 2000, c1998).
- David Barry Gaspar, Darlene Clark Hine (eds.), *More Than Chattel: Black Women And Slavery In The Americas*, (Bloomington, 1996).
- Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Trials of Phillis Wheatley: America's First Black Poet and Her Encounters with the Founding Fathers*, (New York, 2003)
- *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism*, (Oxford, 1989).
- *Figures in Black: Words, Signs and the "Racial" Self*, (New York, 1987).
- (ed.), *"Race," Writing and Difference*, (Chicago, 1986).
- 'The "Blackness of Blackness": A Critique of the Sign and the Signifying Monkey', *Critical Inquiry*, IX.4, (1983), 685-72.
- Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Charles T. Davis (eds.), *The Slave's Narrative*, (Oxford, 1985).
- Eugene D. Genovese, *From Rebellion To Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts In The Making Of The Modern World*, (Baton Rouge, 1992).
- *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World The Slaves Made*, (New York, 1976, c1974).
- 'American Slaves and Their History,' *The New York Review of Books*, (Dec. 3rd, 1970), 34-43.
- *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South*, (New York, 1965).
- Donald B. Gibson, 'Christianity and Individualism: (Re-)Creation and Reality in Frederick Douglass' Representation of Self,' *AAR*, XXVI.4, (1992), 591-603.
- 'Individualism and Community in Black History and Fiction,' *BALF*, XI.4, (1977), 123-129.
- Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*, (New York, 1984).
- Al-Tony Gilmore (ed.), *Revisiting Blassingame's Slave Community: The Scholars Respond*, (Westport, 1978).
- Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, (London, 1993).
- Louis B. Gimelli, 'Louisa Maxwell Cocke: An Evangelical Plantation Mistress in the Antebellum South', *JER*, IX.1, (1989), 53-71.
- Claudia Dale Goldin, *Urban slavery in the American South, 1820-1860: A Quantitative History*, (Chicago, 1976).
- David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and The Politics of Meaning*, (Malden, 2002, c1993).

- Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities In The Colonial and Antebellum South*, (Chapel Hill, 1998).
- Annette Gordon-Reed, 'Celia's Case', in *eadem* (ed.), *Race and Law: Law and Justice in American History*, (Oxford, 2003), 48-60.
- '“The Memories of a few Negroes”: Rescuing America's Future at Monticello', in Jan Ellen Lewis and Peter S. Onuf (eds.), *Sally Hemings & Thomas Jefferson: History, Memory and Civic Culture*, (Charlottesville, VA; London: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 236-354.
- *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy*, (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1997).
- Rodney Dale Green, 'Urban Industry, Black Resistance, and Racial Restriction in the Antebellum South: A General Model and a Case Study in Urban Virginia', *Journal of Economic History*, XLI.1, (1981), 189-191.
- Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Honour & Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as Woman. Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, The Proslavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South*, (Princeton, 1996).
- Rebecca J. Griffin, "'Goin' Back Over There to See That Girl": Competing Social Spaces in the Lives of the Enslaved in Antebellum North Carolina', *S&A*, XXV.1, (2004), 94-133.
- Max L. Grivno, "'Black Frenchmen" and "White Settlers": Race, Slavery, and the Creation of African-American Identities along the Northwest Frontier, 1790-1840,' *S&A*, XXI.3, (2000), 75-93.
- Frank Edgar Grizzard, Jr., "'A Perilous and Grievous Burden": The Dilemma of the Antislavery Slaveholder In Virginia during the Early National Period: A Case Study of General John Hartwell Cocke of Bremon', Masters Thesis, Uva, 1989, <<http://etext.virginia.edu/jefferson/grizzard/thesis/>> viewed 10 May, 2003.
- Ranajit Guha, 'The small voice of history', in Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty (eds.), *Subaltern Studies IX: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi, 1994), 1-12.
- Joan Rezner Gundersen, 'The Double Bonds of Race and Sex: Black and White Women in a Colonial Virginia Parish', *JSH*, LII.3, (1986), 351-372.
- Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family In Slavery And Freedom, 1750-1925*, (Oxford, 1976).
- 'Persistent Myths about the Afro-American Family,' *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, VI.2, (1975), 181-210.
- *Slavery and the Numbers Game: A Critique of Time on the Cross*, (Urbana, 1975).

- _____, 'The World Two Cliometricians Made: A Review-Essay of F+E=T/C', *JNH*, LX.1, (1975), 53-277.
- Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans In Colonial Louisiana: The Development Of Afro-Creole Culture In The Eighteenth Century*, (Baton Rouge, 1992)
- Phillip Hamilton, 'Revolutionary Principles and Family Loyalties: Slavery's Transformation in the St. George Tucker Household of Early National Virginia', *WMQ*, 3.LV.4, (1998), 531-556.
- Jerome S. Handler, 'Survivors of the Middle Passage: Life Histories of Enslaved Africans in British America,' *S&A*, XXIII.3, (2002), 25-56.
- Oscar and Mary F. Handlin, 'Origins of the Southern Labor System', *WMQ*, 3.VII.2, (1950), 199-222.
- Nelson H. Harris, 'Desegregation in North Carolina Institutions of Higher Learning', *The Journal of Negro Education*, XXVII.3, (1958), 295-299.
- Saidiya Hartman, 'Seduction and the Ruses of Power', *Callaloo*, XIX.2, (1996), 537-560.
- G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of the Mind*, J. B. Braille (trans.), (New York, 1967).
- Peter Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren: David Walker And The Problem Of Antebellum Slave Resistance*, (University Park, 1997).
- Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, 'African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race', *Signs*, XII.2, (1992), 251-74.
- _____, 'Beyond the Sound of Silence: Afro-American Women in History', *G&H*, I.1, (1989), 50-67.
- Ben Highmore, *Michel de Certeau: Analysing Culture*, (London, 2006).
- Darlene Clark Hine, *Black Women in America: From Colonial Times Through the Nineteenth Century*, (3 Vols., Oxford, 2005, c1993).
- Ronald Hoffman, Mechal Sobel, Fredrika J. Teute (eds.), *Through A Glass Darkly: Reflections On Personal Identity In Early America* (Chapel Hill, 1997).
- Richard Hofstadter, 'U. B. Phillips and The Plantation Legend', *JNH*, XXIX.2, (1944), 109-124.
- Robert Hogan, 'What Is Personality Psychology?', in Commentaries, *Psychological Inquiry*, IX.2, (1998), 152-153.
- Kristin Hoganson, 'Garrisonian Abolitionists and the Rhetoric of Gender, 1850-1860', *AQ*, XLV.4, (1993), 558-595.
- Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World*, (London, 1990).
- Thomas C. Holt, 'Marking: Race, Race-making, and the Writing of History,' *AHR*, Vol. C.1, (1995), 1-20.

- bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, (London, 1982, c1981).
- Gregory S. Jay, 'American Literature and the New Historicism: The Example of Frederick Douglass', *boundary 2*, XVII.1, (1990), 211-242.
- Thelma Jennings, "'Us Colored Women Had to Go Through a Plenty": Sexual Exploitation of African-American Slave Women', *Journal of Women's History*, I.3, (1990), 45-74.
- Michael Johnson, 'Denmark Vesey and His Co-Conspirators', *WMQ*, 3.LVIII.4, (2001), 915-976.
- Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside The Antebellum Slave Market*, (Cambridge, 1999).
- William Courtland Johnson, "'A Delusive Clothing": Christian Conversion in the Antebellum Slave Community', *JNH*, LXXXII.3, (1997), 295-311.
- James Hugo Johnston, *Race Relations in Virginia & Miscegenation in the South, 1776-1860*, (Amherst, 1970).
- 'The Participation of White Men in Virginia Negro Insurrections', *JNH*, XVI.2, (1931) 158-167.
- Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812*, (Chapel Hill, 1968).
- Charles W. Joyner, *Down by the Riverside: a South Carolina Slave Community*, (Urbana, 1984).
- Samira Kawash, *Dislocating the Color Line: Identity, Hybridity, and Singularity in African-American Narrative*, (Stanford, 1997).
- A. E. Kaye, 'Neighbourhoods and Solidarity in the Natchez District of Mississippi: Rethinking the Antebellum Slave Community', *S&A*, XXIII.3, (2002), 1-24.
- Hans Kellner, 'Narrativity in History: Post-Structuralism and Since', *H&T*, XVI.4, (1987), 1-29.
- Eric Ketelaar, 'Archival Temples, Archival Prisons: Modes of Power and Protection', *Archival Science*, 2, (2002), 221-223.
- 'Tacit Narratives: The Meanings of Archives', *Archival Science*, I.1, (2001), 131-141.
- Richard H. King, 'Domination and Fabrication: Re-thinking Stanley Elkins' *Slavery*', *S&A*, XXII.2, (2001), 1-28.
- Wilma King, *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth-Century America*, (Bloomington, 1995).
- Thomas A. Kohut, 'Psychohistory as History', *AHR*, XCI.2, (1986), 336-354.
- Peter Kolchin, 'Eugene D. Genovese: Historian of Slavery', *RHR*, 88, (2004), 52-67.
- *Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom*, (Cambridge, 1987).

- _____'Reevaluating the Antebellum Slave Community: A Comparative Perspective', *JAH*, XLVI.3, (1983), 579-601
- _____'Comparing American History', *Reviews in American History*, X.4, (1982), 64-81.
- _____'In Defense of Servitude: American Proslavery and Russian Proserfdom Arguments, 1760-1860', *AHR*, LXXXV.4, (1980), 809-827.
- Gary Kornblith, 'Traces of History: A William Lloyd Garrison Discovery', in Ray English, Jessica Grim, Megan Mitchell (eds.) *Library Perspectives: A Newsletter of the Oberlin College Library*, 29, (2003), 4-5.
- Kerwin Lee Klein, 'In Search of Narrative Mastery: Postmodernism and the People without History,' *H&T*, XXXIV.4, (1995), 275-298.
- Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800*, (Chapel Hill, 1986).
- _____'The Origins of Afro-American Society in Tidewater Maryland and Virginia, 1700 to 1790,' *WMQ*, 3.XXXV.2, (1978), 226-259.
- Linda Krumholz, 'The Ghosts of Slavery: Historical Recovery in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*', *AAR*, XXVI.3, (1992), 395-408.
- Dominick Lacapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, (Baltimore, 2001)
- _____'Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts', *H&T*, XIX.3, (1980), 245-276.
- Ann J. Lane (ed.), *The Debate Over Slavery: Stanley Elkins and His Critics*, (Urbana, 1971).
- Frank Lambert, "'I Saw the Book Talk': Slave Readings of the First Great Awakening,' *JNH*, LXXVII.4, (1992), 185-198.
- Lawrence Langer, *Versions of Survival: The Holocaust and the Human Spirit*, (Albany, 1982).
- Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture And Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery To Freedom*, (Oxford, 1977).
- Robert S. Levine, *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, And The Politics Of Representative Identity*, (Chapel Hill, 1997).
- Earl Lewis, 'To Turn as on a Pivot: Writing African Americans into a History of Overlapping Diasporas', *AHR*, Vol. 100, No. 3. (Jun., 1995), 765-787.
- Ronald L. Lewis, *Coal, Iron, and Slaves: Industrial Slavery in Maryland and Virginia*, (Westport, 1979).
- Sylvère Lotringer, Sande Cohen (eds.), *French Theory in America*, (New York, 2001).
- Paul E. Lovejoy (ed.) *Identity in the Shadow of Slavery*, (London, 2000).

- Laura Marcus, *Auto/Biographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice*, (Manchester, 1994).
- Johnathan D. Martin, *Divided Mastery: Slave Hiring in the American South*, (Cambridge, 2004).
- Dan McAdams, 'Personality, Modernity, and the Storied Self: A Contemporary Framework for Studying Persons', *Psychological Inquiry*, VII.4, (1996), 295-321.
- Timothy Patrick McCarthy, "'To Plead Our Own Cause": Black Print Culture and the Origins of American Abolitionism', in *idem*, John Stauffer (eds.), *Prophets of Protest: Reconsidering the History of American Abolitionism*, (New York, 2006), 114-146.
- Barbara McCaskill, "'Yours Very Truly": Ellen Craft--The Fugitive as Text and Artifact,' *AAR*, XXVIII.4, (1994), 509-529.
- Melton McClaurin, *Celia, A Slave*, (New York, 1999, c1991).
- Roderick A. McDonald, *The Economy and Material Culture of Slaves: Goods and Chattels on the Sugar Plantations of Jamaica and Louisiana*, (Baton Rouge, 1993).
- Howard McGary, Bill E. Lawson, *Between Slavery And Freedom: Philosophy And American Slavery*, (Bloomington, 1992). Donald G. Mathews, 'Charles Colcock Jones and the Southern Evangelical Crusade to Form a Biracial Community', *JSH*, XLI.1, (1975), 299-320.
- Sally Gregory McMillen, *Southern Women: Black and White in the Old South*, (Arlington Heights, 1992).
- Daniel E. Meaders, 'South Carolina Fugitives as Viewed Through Local Colonial Newspapers with Emphasis on Runaway Notices 1732-1801,' *JNH*, LX.2, (1975), 288-319.
- Allan Megill, 'The Reception of Foucault by Historians', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XLVIII .1, (1987), 117-141.
- Claude Meillassoux, *The Anthropology Of Slavery: The Womb Of Iron And Gold*, Alide Dasnois (trans.), (London, 1991).
- Nancy K. Miller, *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical Acts*, (New York, 1991).
- Angelyn Mitchell, *The Freedom To Remember: Narrative, Slavery and Gender in Contemporary Black Women's Fiction*, (New Brunswick, 2002).
- Norma Taylor Mitchell, 'Making the Most of Life's Opportunities: A Slave Woman and Her Family in Abingdon', in Janet L. Coryell, Martha H. Swain, Sandra Gioia Treadway, and Elizabeth Hayes Turner (eds.), *Beyond Image and Convention: Explorations in Southern Women's History*, (Columbia, MS: University of Missouri Press, 1998), 74-98.

- John Hebron Moore, 'Simon Gray, Riverman: A Slave Who Was Almost Free', *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XLIX.3, (1962), 472-484.
- William Cabell Moore, 'Gen. John Hartwell Cocke of Brems 1780-1866: A Brief Biography and Genealogical Review with a Short History of Old Brems', *WMQ*, 2.XIII.4, (1934), 207-218.
- 'Gen. John Hartwell Cocke of Brems 1780-1866: A Brief Biography and Genealogical Review with a Short History of Old Brems', *WMQ*, 2.XIII.3, (1933), 143-154.
- Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*, (New York, 1975).
- 'Slavery and Freedom: The American Paradox', *JAH*, LIX.1, (1972), 5-29.
- Jennifer L. Morgan, "'Some Could Suckle over Their Shoulder": Male Travellers, Female Bodies, and the Gendering of Racial Ideology, 1500-1770', *WMQ*, 3.LIV.1, (1997), 167-192.
- Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the eighteenth-century Chesapeake and Lowcountry*, (Chapel Hill, 1998).
- 'Colonial South Carolina Runaways: Their Significance for Slave Culture', *S&A*, VI.3, (1985), 57-78.
- 'Black Life in Eighteenth Century Charleston', *Perspectives in American History*, 1, (1984), 187-232.
- 'The Ownership of Property by Slaves in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century Low Country', *JSH*, XLIX.3, (1983), 399-420.
- 'Work and Culture: The Task System and the World of Lowcountry Blacks, 1700 to 1880,' *WMQ*, 3.XXXIX.4, (1982), 563-599.
- Christopher Morris, 'The Articulation of Two Worlds: The Master-Slave Relationship Reconsidered', *JAH*, LXXXV.3, (1998), 982-1007.
- Patricia Morton (ed.), *Discovering The Women In Slavery: Emancipating Perspectives On The American Past*, (Athens 1996).
- *Disfigured Images: The Historical Assault on Afro-American Women*, (New York, 1991).
- Gerald W. Mullin, *Flight And Rebellion: Slave Resistance In Eighteenth-Century Virginia*, (Oxford, 1972).
- Michael Mullin, *Africa In America: Slave Acculturation And Resistance In The American South And The British Caribbean, 1736-1831*, (Urbana, 1994).
- Harriet Mullen, 'Runaway Tongue: Resistant Orality in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Our Nig*, *Incidents in the Life of A Slave Girl*, and *Beloved*', in Shirley Samuels, *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in 19th Century America*, (New York, 1992), 244-264.

- Ann Musher, 'Contesting "The Way the Almighty Wants It": Crafting Memories of Ex-Slaves in the Slave Narrative Collection', *AQ*, LIII.1, (2001) 1-31.
- Michael D. Naragon, 'Communities in Motion: Drapetomania, Work and the Development of African-American Slave Cultures,' *S&A*, XV.3, (1994), 63-87.
- Gary B. Nash, *Red, White, and Black: The Peoples of Early America*, (Englewood Cliffs, 1992, c. 1972).
- Cary Nelson, Lawrence Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, (Chicago, 1987).
- Michael L. Nicholls, "'The Squint Freedom': African-American Freedom Suits in Post-Revolutionary Virginia,' *S&A*, XX.2, (1999), 47-62.
- Charles H. Nichols, Jr., 'Slave Narratives and the Plantation Legend', *Phylon*, X.3, (1949), 201-210.
- James Oakes, 'The Sixth Element', *RHR*, 88, (2004), 49-51.
- *Slavery and Freedom: An Interpretation of The Old South*, (New York, 1990).
- *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders*, (New York, 1998, c1982).
- Tejumola Olaniyan, 'African-American Critical Discourse and the Invention of Cultural Identities,' *AAR*, XXVI.4, (1992), 533-545.
- James Olney, "'I Was Born": Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature', *Callaloo*, 20, (1984), 46-73, (reprinted in Gates and Davis, *Narrative*, 148-174).
- Robert Olwell, *Masters, Slaves, & Subjects: The Culture Of Power In The South Carolina Low Country, 1740-1790*, (Ithaca, 1998).
- Katalin Orban, 'Dominant and Submerged Discourses in The Life of Olaudah Equiano (or Gustavus Vassa?),' *AAR*, XXVII.4, (1993), 655-664.
- Iyunolu Folayan Osagie, *The Amistad Revolt: Memory, Slavery, And The Politics Of Identity In The United States And Sierra Leone*, (Athens, 2000).
- James A. Page, 'Black Literature', *The English Journal*, LXII.5, (1973), 709-717.
- Nell Irving Painter, *Creating Black Americans: African American History and its Meanings, 1619 to the Present*, (Oxford, 2006).
- *Southern History Across the Color Line*, (Chapel Hill, 2002).
- Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, (Cambridge, 1982).
- Stephan Palmié (ed.), *Slave Cultures And The Cultures Of Slavery*, (Knoxville, 1995).

- Peter J. Parish, *Slavery: History And Historians*, (New York, 1989).
- Edward A. Pearson, "'A Countryside Full of Flames': A Reconsideration of the Stono Rebellion and Slave Rebelliousness in the Eighteenth-Century South Carolina Low Country', *S&A*, XVII.2 (1996), 22-50.
- (ed.), *Designs against Charleston: The Trial Record of the Denmark Vesey Slave Conspiracy of 1822*, (Chapel Hill, 1999).
- William H. Pease and Jane H. Pease, 'Walker's Appeal Comes to Charleston: A Note and Documents', *JNH*, LIX.3, (1974), 287-292.
- Ulrich B. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime*, (New York, 1952, c1918).
- *Life and Labor in the Old South*, (Boston, 1929).
- Carl Plasa, *Textual Politics From Slavery To Postcolonialism: Race And Identification*, (Basingstoke, 2000)
- Carl Plasa, Betty J. Ring (eds.), *The Discourse Of Slavery: Aphra Behn To Toni Morrison*, (London, 1994).
- Richard H. Popkin, *The High Road to Pyrrhonism*, Richard A. Watson & James E. Force (eds.), (Indianapolis, 1993).
- Mark Poster, *Cultural History and Postmodernity: Disciplinary Readings and Challenges*, (New York, 1997),
- David W. Price, *History Made, History Imagined: Contemporary Literature, Poiesis, and the Past*, (Champaign, 1999).
- Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The 'Invisible Institution' in the Antebellum South*, (Oxford, 2004, c1978).
- Patrick Rael, 'A Common Nature, A United Destiny: African American Responses to Racial Science from the Revolution to the Civil War', in McCarthy & Stauffer *Prophets*, 183-199.
- *Black Identity & Black Protest in the Antebellum North*, (Chapel Hill, 2002).
- Lee Rainwater, William L. Yancey, *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy, including the full text of 'The Negro Family: The Case for National Action' by Daniel Patrick Moynihan*, (Cambridge, 1967).
- George Rawick, *From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community*, (Westport, 1973).
- Alan Rice, *Radical Narratives of the Black Atlantic*, (London, 2003).
- Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, Kathleen Blamey (trans.), (Chicago, 1992).
- *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics II*, Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson, (trans./eds.), (London, 1991)

- _____. *Hermeneutics & The Human Sciences*, John B. Thompson (trans./ed.), (Cambridge, 1981).
- _____. *The Symbolism of Evil*, Emerson Buchanan (trans.), (Boston, 1967).
- David Robertson, *Denmark Vesey: The Buried History of America's Largest Slave Rebellion and the Man Who Led It*, (New York, 1999).
- Caroline Rody, 'Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: History, "Rememory," and a "Clamor for a Kiss"', *ALH*, VII.1, (1995), 92-119.
- Willie Lee Rose, *Slavery and Freedom*, William W. Freehling (ed.), (Oxford, 1982).
- Bruce Rosen, 'Abolition and Colonization, the Years of Conflict: 1829-1834', *Phylon*, XXXIII.2 (1972), 177-192.
- Daniel J. Royer, 'The Process of Literacy as Communal Involvement in the Narratives of Frederick Douglass,' *AAR*, XXVIII.3, (1994), 363-374.
- Sandi Russell, *Render Me My Song: African-American Women Writers From Slavery To The Present*, (London, 2002).
- Floyd Rudmin, Rüdiger M. Trimpop, Ilona-Patricia Kryl and Pawel Boski, 'Gustav Ichheiser in the history of social psychology: An early phenomenology of social attribution', *British Journal of Social Psychology* 26, (1987), 165-180.
- Maggie Montesinos Sale, 'Critiques from Within: Antebellum Projects of Resistance,' *AL*, LXIV.4, (1992), 695-718.
- Keith Sandiford, *Measuring the Moment: Strategies of Protest in Eighteenth-century Afro-English Writing*, (London, 1988).
- Simon Schama, *Rough Crossings: Britain, the Slaves and the American Revolution*, (London, 2005).
- Loren Schweninger, 'The Underside of Slavery: the Internal Economy, Self-Hire, and Quasi-Freedom in Virginia, 1780-1865', *S&A*, XII.2, (1991), 1-22.
- _____. 'A Slave Family in the Ante Bellum South,' *JNH*, LX.1, (1975), 29-44.
- James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, (New Haven, 1998).
- _____. *Domination And The Arts Of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, (New Haven, 1990).
- John Sekora, 'Black Message/White Envelope: Genre, Authenticity, and Authority in the Antebellum Slave Narrative', *Callaloo*, 32, (1987), 482-515.
- John Sekora, Darwin T. Turner (eds.), *The Art of The Slave Narrative: Original Essays In Criticism And Theory*, (Macomb, 1982).
- James Sidbury, *Ploughshares Into Swords: Race, Rebellion, And Identity In Gabriel's Virginia, 1730-1810*, (Cambridge, 1997).

- Rupe Simms, 'Controlling Images and the Gender Construction of Enslaved African Women', *G&S*, XV.6, (2001), 879-897.
- Diane Miller Sommerville, 'Moonlight, Magnolias, and Brigadoon; or, "Almost Like Being in Love": Mastery and Sexual Exploitation in Eugene D. Genovese's Plantation South', in *RHR*, 88, (2004), 68-82.
- Mechal Sobel, *The World They Made Together: Black And White Values In Eighteenth-Century Virginia*, (Princeton, 1987).
- _____, *Trabelin' On: The Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith*, (Westport, 1979).
- Julia Floyd Smith, *Slavery and Rice Culture in Low Country Georgia, 1750-1860*, (Knoxville, 1985).
- Mark M. Smith, 'Remembering Mary, Shaping Revolt: Reconsidering the Stono Rebellion', *JSH*, LXVII.3, (2001), 513-34.
- Audrey Smedley, *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview*, (Boulder, 1999, c1993).
- John Solomos and Les Back, *Racism and Society*, (Basingstoke, 1996).
- Carolyn Sorisio, 'Unmasking the Genteel Performer: Elizabeth Keckley's behind the Scenes and the Politics of Public Wrath', *AAR*, XXXIV.1 (2000), 19-38.
- Gabrielle M. Spiegel (ed.), *Practicing History: New Directions in Historical Writing after the Linguistic Turn*, (London, 2005),
- Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, (Cambridge, 1999).
- _____, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', Cary Nelson, Lawrence Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, (Chicago, 1987), 271-315.
- Kenneth M. Stampp, 'Rebels and Sambos: The Search for the Negro's Personality in Slavery', *JSH*, XXXVII.3, (1971), 367-392.
- _____, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery In The Ante-Bellum South*, (New York, 1956).
- Lucia Stanton, 'The Other End of the Telescope: Jefferson through the Eyes of His Slaves,' *WMQ*, 3.LVII.1, (2000), 139-152.
- Robert Starobin, 'Privileged Bondsmen and the Process of Accommodation: The Role of Houseservants and Drivers as Seen in Their Own Letters', *JSocH*, V.1, (1971), 46-70.
- _____, *Industrial Slavery in the Old South*, (New York, 1970).
- _____, 'The Negro: A Central Theme in American History,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, III.2, (1968), 37-53.
- _____, 'Disciplining Industrial Slaves in the Old South,' *JNH*, LIII.2, (1968), 111-128.

- John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of White Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race*, (Cambridge, 2002).
- Charles G. Steffen, 'In Search of the Good Overseer: The Failure of the Agricultural Reform Movement in Lowcountry South Carolina, 1821-1834', *JSH*, LXIII.4. (1997), 753-802.
- Robert Burns Stepto, *From Behind the Veil: A Study of African American Narrative*, (Chicago, 1991, c1979).
- Brenda E. Stevenson, *Life In Black And White: Family And Community In The Slave South*, (New York, 1996).
- James Brewer Stewart, 'The Emergence of Racial Modernity and the Rise of the White North, 1790-1840', *JER*, XVIII.2, (1998), 181-217.
- David M. Streifford, 'The American Colonization Society: An Application of Republican Ideology to Early Antebellum Reform', *JSH*, XLV.2, (1979), 201-220.
- Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory And The Foundations Of Black America*, (New York, 1987).
- 'Through the Prism of Folklore: The Black Ethos In Slavery', *Massachusetts Review*, XI.3, (1968), 417-437, reprinted in Allen Weinstein, Frank Otto Gatell (eds.) *American Negro Slavery: A Modern Reader*, (Oxford, 1973), 134-152.
- Midori Takagi, "Rearing wolves to our own destruction": *Slavery in Richmond, Virginia, 1782-1865*, (Charlottesville, 1999).
- Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*, (London, 1993).
- John B. Thompson, *Critical Hermeneutics: A study in the thought of Paul Ricoeur and Jürgen Habermas*, (Cambridge, 1981).
- Robert Brent Toplin, 'Between Black and White: Attitudes Toward Southern Mulattoes, 1830-1861', *JSH*, LXV.2, (1979), 186-190.
- Richard T. Vann, 'The Reception of Hayden White', *H&T*, XXXVII.2, (1998), 143-161.
- Henry Isaac Venema, *Identifying Selfhood: Imagination, Narrative, And Hermeneutics In The Thought Of Paul Ricoeur*, (New York, 2000).
- Alden T. Vaughan, *The Roots of American Racism: Essays on Colonial Perceptions and Policies*, (New York, 1995).
- 'Blacks in Virginia: A Note on the First Decade' (in Notes and Documents), *WMQ*, 3.XXIX.3, (1972), 469-478
- Paul Virilio, *The Aesthetics of Disappearance*, Philip Beitchman, (trans.), (Brooklyn, 1991).

- Richard C. Wade, *Slavery In the Cities: The South, 1820-1860*, (Oxford, 1964).
- Lorena S. Walsh, *From Calabar to Carter's Grove: The History of a Virginia Slave Community*, (Charlottesville, 1997).
- Krista Walter, 'Trappings of Nationalism in Frederick Douglass's The Heroic Slave', *AAR*, XXXIV.2, (2000), 233-247.
- James Walvin, *Questioning Slavery*, (New York, 1996).
- 'Slaves, Free Time and the Question of Leisure,' *S&A*, XIV.1, (1995), 1-13.
- Pauline Turner Wangman, 'Unfinished journeys: narratives of slavery from Olaudah Equiano to Toni Morrison,' Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1992.
- Fred Weinstein, 'Psychohistory and the Crisis of the Social Sciences', *H&T*, XXXIV.4, (1995), 299-319.
- Emily West, *Chains of Love: Slave Couples in Antebellum South Carolina*, (Urbana, 2004).
- 'Tensions, tempers, and temptations: marital discord among slaves in antebellum South Carolina', *American Nineteenth Century History Journal*, V.2, (2004), 1-18
- 'Masters and Marriages, Profits and Paternalism: Slave Owners' Perspectives on Cross-Plantation Unions in Antebellum South Carolina,' *S&A*, XXI.1, (2000), 56-72.
- Wim Weymans, 'Michel de Certeau and the Limits of Historical Representation', *H&T*, LXIII.2, (2004), 161-178.
- Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, (New York, 1985).
- William E. Wiethoff, 'Enslaved Africans' Rivalry with White Overseers in Plantation Culture: An Unconventional Interpretation', *JBS*, XXVI.3, (2006), 429-455.
- Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, Colin A. Palmer (int.), (Chapel Hill, 1994, c1944).
- Heather Andrea Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom*, (Chapel Hill, 2005).
- Harvey Wish, 'The Slave Insurrection Panic of 1856', *JSH*, V.32, (1939), 206-222.
- 'American Slave Insurrections before 1861', *JNH*, XXII.23, (1937), 435-450.
- T. Stephen Whitman, 'Industrial Slavery at the Margin: The Maryland Chemical Works', *JSH*, LIX.1, (1993), 31-62.
- Betty Wood, *Women's Work, Men's Work: The Informal Slave Economies of Lowcountry Georgia*, (Athens, 1995).

- Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion*, (New York, 1996, c1974).
- Carter G. Woodson, *The Education of The Negro Prior to 1861: The History of the Education of the Colored People of the United States from the Beginning of Slavery to the Civil War*, (North Stratford, 2002, c.1919).
- Jean Fagan Yellin, *Harriet Jacobs: A Life*, (New York, 2004).
- 'Written by Herself: Harriet Jacobs' Slave Narrative', *AL*, LIII.3, (1981), 479-486.
- Norman R. Yetman, 'The Background of the Slave Narrative Collection', *AQ*, XIX.3, (1967), 534-553.
- Jeffrey Robert Young, *Domesticating Slavery: The Ideological Formation of the Master Class in Georgia and South Carolina, from Colonization to 1837*, (Chapel Hill, 1999).
- Joshua Michael Zeitz, 'The Missouri Compromise Reconsidered: Antislavery Rhetoric and the Emergence of the Free Labor Synthesis', *JER*, Vol. 20, No. 3. (Autumn, 2000), 447-485.